BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE

NUMBER 1638

Contents for April 1952

THE KING

A RUTHLESS CITY
By John Welman

FAREWELL TO ASCENSION
By A. G. Bee

COTTAGE AT THE COAST
By J. A. K.

JORROCKS IN THE ANTIPODES
By J. V. Davidson-Houston

SKI IN KURDISTAN
By D. L. Bush

THE PEERLESS *TRANSIT*
By R. B. Chenevix Trench

ODD FISH
By Oliver Cassals

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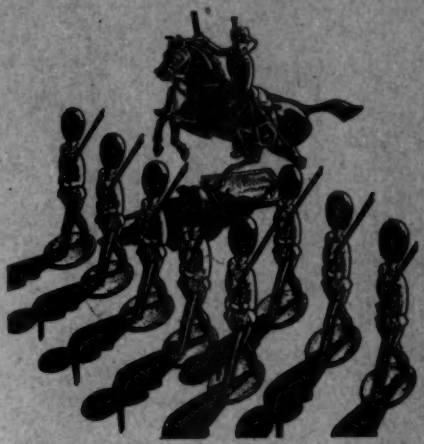

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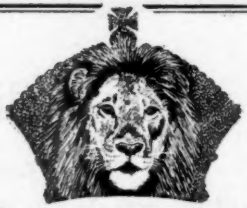

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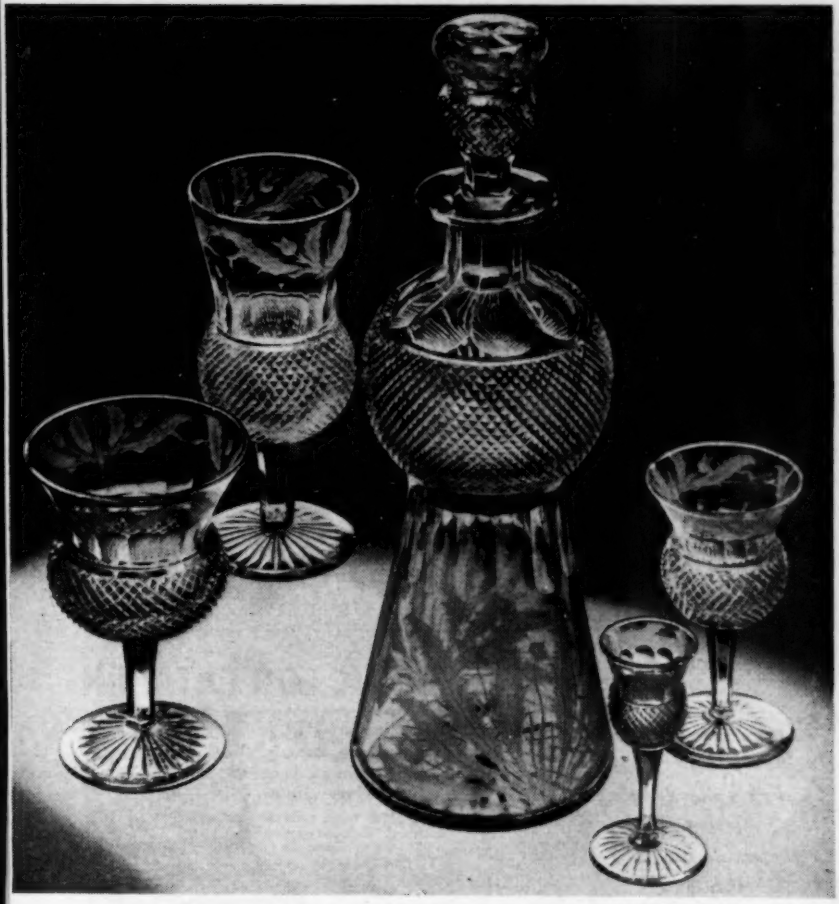

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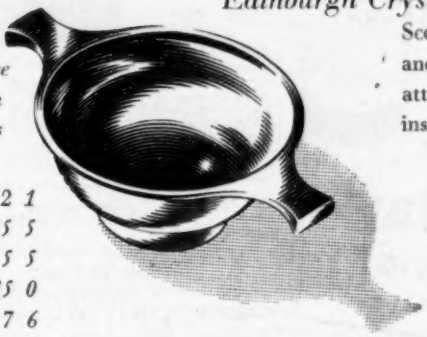

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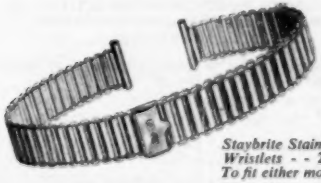

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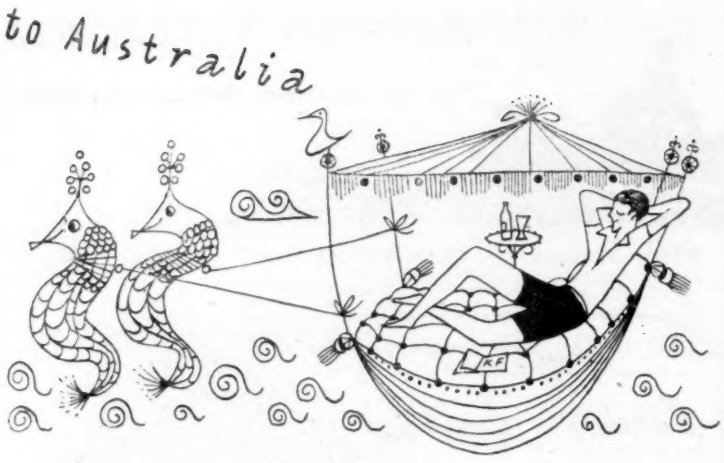

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BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.

No. 1638. APRIL 1952. Vol. 271.

The King,	289
A Ruthless City. By John Welman,	293
Farewell to Ascension. By A. G. Bee,	303
Cottage at the Coast. By J. A. K.,	315
Jorrocks in the Antipodes. By J. V. Davidson-Houston,	330
Ski in Kurdistan. By D. L. Busk,	334
The Peerless *Transit*. By R. B. Chenevix Trench,	346
Odd Fish. By Oliver Cassels,	358
Comment,	375

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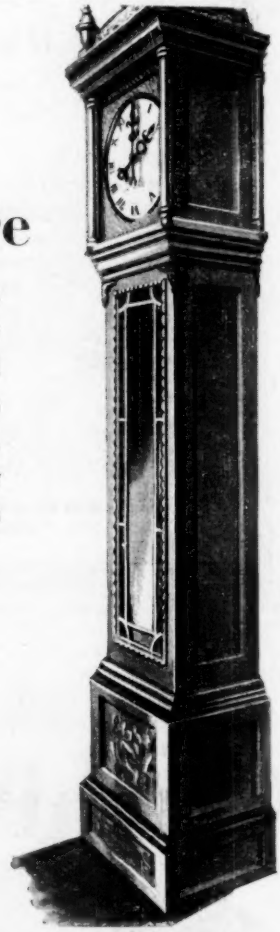

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BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.

No. 1638. APRIL 1952. Vol. 271.

THE KING.

"Who in the realm today lays down dear life for the sake of a land more dear?
And unconcerned for his own estate, toils till the last grudged sands have run?
Let him approach. It is proven here
Our King asks nothing of any man more than our King himself has done."

These words, written on the death of King Edward VII., are as appropriate to his grandson. Many must have tried to account for the spontaneous outburst of grief when the news of King George's passing came through on the morning of 6th February. Here was no formal tribute to a dead monarch from the millions who had never spoken to him, most of whom perhaps had never seen him. Mingled with sympathy for wife and mother and daughter was a genuine sense of personal loss. The King was dead, and possibly no other event would have given such proof of the affection of his people.

He never courted popularity. He was not, in vulgar phrase, a spectacular figure. He had never sought kingship, or expected it, or in the beginning, superficially, appeared to have the equipment men generally associate with it. He was a second son and a delicate boy. He was shy and stammered. Trained to be a sailor, he might have hoped, like his father before him, for a happy career in the Royal Navy. But ill-health dogged him. During the First World War he had one disabling illness after another, conquered each in turn with quiet courage, contrived to fight at Jutland, and won a commendation for his conduct in action.

After the war, having been a serious sailor, he became as serious an airman, being given his wings. He went to Cambridge,

and after Cambridge had the original idea of an annual camp, where boys from the public schools and from industry could meet in comradeship; and year after year he visited the camp he had founded, joining in all the fun of it with unaffected pleasure.

Then in 1923, the starting-point of a perfect partnership, he married Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon. From that moment the pattern of his life seemed plain. With sympathy and good sense he would modestly perform, as already he did, the duties of a younger son of the Royal House. As a husband and later as a father he would lead a simple, happy family life. That was all he expected and all he asked.

But in 1936 came the crisis of the Abdication and the sudden call on the Duke of York to succeed the brother he had loved so well and served so loyally. He would have been less than human if he had not shrunk from an event which in a moment shattered the mould of his life. But he knew his duty and had his father's example before his eyes. Archbishop Lang has recorded how, in the first letter he had from the new King, he noted with wonder the signature, for it might have been that of King George V. So, in a spirit of dedicated service and sustained by a vital religious impulse, King George VI. took up the fearful burden which he knew he must carry henceforth till his life's end.

> "Upon the King! Let us our lives, our souls,
> Our debts, our careful wives,
> Our children, and our sins lay on the King!"

He was forty-one, an age when men often have become set in their ways; but doggedly he set himself to conquer his shyness and his stammer and to fit himself for his new task. It was a burden indeed, but he faced it without flinching and with the comfort of a wife whose courage matched his own. The world knows how well he won his battle.

He had been King for less than three years when war came to test his resolution. For the King, as for the least of his subjects, war brought its stresses and trials, its sacrifices, its anxieties, its grinding toil. There were those endless visits and inspections, redeemed from empty formality by King George's interest in and affection for the common man. Later came exacting journeys overseas—to Africa, to Italy, and to France. There was a high example to be shown under the light that beats more strongly on the Throne in war than in peace. There was the need to share the troubles, the deprivations, the sorrows, even the dangers of the people, and without fuss or dissimulation to show that he shared them. When the German planes roared over London, the King, too, had his escape and his bomb story. He had no thought of leaving his capital for some quieter spot. When

invasion threatened, quietly, with the Palace staff, he practised with a rifle; and men knew that if the Germans came, the King would play his part without regard for his own safety.

As it had been during the war, so it was afterwards, in the uneasy years of doubtful peace. Ministers might come and go, policies might change, crises might break. About the King, at least, in this changing and precarious world there was something rocklike, unshaken and unshakable. The British are rightly jealous for their Royal House. They know that the King can do no wrong in law; but they expect him also to do no wrong in any circumstance; and in this they came to know that they could count upon the King. Whether he was visiting his people in the Union of South Africa, or entertaining high guests in London, or doing the daily round of kingship, in all he said and did there was rightness, kindliness, simplicity, dignity. In an unsafe world people felt somehow that with the King they were safe.

In November 1948, when he was awaiting the birth of his first grandchild, he was taken ill, the arteries of his left leg, which had troubled him when he was a boy, having contracted. Characteristically the King decided that nothing should be said about his illness until the child had been born and the nation had had its days of carefree rejoicing. It so happened that a big Commonwealth Conference was being held just then in London and that the delegates were to be entertained at Buckingham Palace. They came, and for nearly two hours the King stood talking to them. None guessed what the effort cost him or at what hazard he was host.

For he was seriously ill and at last an operation was necessary. This was successful, and soon he was taking up again the heavy burden of work, travelling about the country, receiving the President of the French Republic, inspecting this and visiting that, allowed to do less than he wished to do, though more, perhaps, than he should have done. And there was a postponed journey to Australia and New Zealand he was hoping to make.

In the early summer of 1951 he was at St Paul's for the service which was to inaugurate the Festival of Britain. A few days later he was down with influenza, which through the summer months he was unable to shake off. Something worse than influenza was the trouble. It was a serious infection of one lung, and another and even graver operation was at length decided on. This, too, he faced with the same courage and will to win through he had shown before; and by the end of the year he seemed to be better and stronger. He was back at Sandringham for Christmas—his last Christmas; round him his family were gathered, and once more he spoke over the air to his people. The weeks went by. He had had to give up all idea of the journey

to Australia and New Zealand, but his elder daughter and her husband were to go instead; and on the last day of January the King went to the airport to wish them Godspeed. Those who saw him there were distressed by the marks of strain and suffering on his face. He had endured so much for so long.

He went back to Sandringham. On 5th February he was out for an hour or two in the countryside he loved; and that night, without warning or pain, he died in his sleep.

The people sorrowed for all that they had lost; and also because they had seen in the King a man who had high standards of conduct in days when life was shot through with shoddiness; who had a strong religious faith, when the faith of so many was shaken or had never had meaning; who rejoiced in the strength and affection of his own family life, when so much was undermining and weakening the family tie; who did his duty, quietly, modestly, and as a matter of course, when duty had an old-fashioned air. He stood for what was old and tried; and many who were following strange new gods yet looked up to him in respect, in honour, and in love. It may be that they saw in him their own better self, the sort of man they would be and were not.

The King is dead! Long live the Queen! She is her father's daughter, and with her the people may enter a new reign unafraid.

A RUTHLESS CITY.

BY JOHN WELMAN.

WHEN, one evening in the spring of 1951, Mr Tutsan arrived at Cairo's airport and found that he would have to stay the night in the city, he was at first dismayed. He was used to having things happen as he had arranged them, and this was not according to plan; at Khartoum there would have been a car to meet him. A short, middle-aged man wearing a town suit and soft black hat, he stood in the shadow of one of the wings that had borne him from England, and wondered what to do next.

An official hurried past. Mr Tutsan stepped forward, his owlish shell-rimmed glasses flashing an S.O.S. in the rays of the setting sun. "Hotel? There's a bus behind the hangars," the man called over his shoulder. "Take you in no time, if it hasn't gone."

Clutching bag and despatch-case, the traveller trotted after him. But there were formalities; it was dark when he reached the Continental Hotel.

As soon as he had secured a room he went out on to the terrace and stood there watching the noisy crowds drift past. The scene confused him. Were they Greeks or Egyptians, the ones with flower-pot hats? Levantines, perhaps. A man in a filthy gown reached over the rail and thrust a bundle of walking-sticks in his face; another, rattling a metal tray, screamed "pea-nuts" in his ear. Like one who, close to a cage, sees a notice declaring the animals dangerous, he stepped hastily back.

"You look kind of lost," said a voice from a nearby table.

"Lost?" He frowned. It was a fact that he had never before been farther abroad than France.

"Yes, lost." It sounded like "last," the way he said it. "What'll you drink? Dry martini?"

"Thank you." He sat down, and, when the other had introduced himself briefly, said: "Er — name of Tutsan — from the Ministry — commission on labour conditions in the Sudan."

The recitation failed to impress; he was not even asked which Ministry he represented. The American regarded him incuriously. "Reckon it's your first trip," was all he said.

"To Cairo, yes," Mr Tutsan admitted. "Though I've knocked about elsewhere quite a bit."

"Is that so? Well, you are lucky to be here when the Gypos aren't so anti-British; since last month's fireworks they've cooled off a whole lot."

Two women came in off the street, and Mr Tutsan found himself shaking hands with his companion's wife and sister-in-

law. They seemed to be in a hurry. There was another quick round of cocktails, then the party broke up. They were going to dine at a new cabaret-restaurant that was sometimes patronised by Egypt's king. Would he wish to make a fourth? He thought not. He would like to have material for conversation, some touches of local colour to use at home when talk of Cairo cropped up.

"Thank you, but I will dine here and then take a stroll."

"Watch that you don't get lost," one of the women warned him.

Mr Tutsan patted the top of his head humorously. "I have an excellent bump of locality," he said.

He walked purposefully along the street, crossed over to a public garden, and continued his promenade along its flank. The half-bottle of wine he had drunk at dinner, the new money in his pockets, made him feel confident, intrepid, and yet benign. The night was warm. He tilted his hat a little and swung his stick.

Most of the shops were closed, but there were many pavement cafés, all brightly lit, and where one of these abutted on a corner he took a narrow turning to the right. A scene less pseudo-European, more exotically tinted, was what he sought.

Keeping to this narrow way he crossed several streets whose shuttered houses, gaunt and tall, would not have seemed out of place in a winter seaside town, and came at length to an open space. It was a square enclosed by low-roofed buildings, one of which was a ramshackle coffee-shop. Set end to end outside it were some backless benches that looked like punts moored in a stream, the customers perched cross-legged on them having the air of disconsolate anglers as they puffed their pipes or poured out coffee from snake-spouted pots. Two, seated facing each other, were playing backgammon on an iron tray. One man, hawk-nosed and bearded, sat alone.

A "battered caravanserai!" A picture, wholly oriental, formed in Mr Tutsan's mind while he watched with fascination a group of four who shared a water-pipe. And what game was this the others played? He moved nearer to look. He was not aware that he was being stared at until, without change of expression, the hawk-nosed one suddenly spat.

Mr Tutsan looked angrily from him to his spattered shoe. "Disgusting!" he exclaimed loudly and turned away. He rather hurried as he left the square, and once looked back.

He decided to return to the public garden and set off from there in another direction, but after walking some distance realised that the street he was in, though likewise narrow, was not the same. Rather than go back to the square, and assuming that the other street ran parallel, he entered an alley leading off to the left, which would, he was sure, set him right. It seemed a very long

alley. It was deserted, darkened by overhanging balcony-rooms, and it twisted like a snake. And on coming to its end he found himself with startling suddenness in the midst of a thronged bazaar.

Many things in the world of Islam were hidden from Mr Tutsan, and one of them was that the month was Ramadan, when Muslims, breaking their fast at sunset, turn the rest of the night into day. Another was that foreigners seldom visited the place at that hour. If he had been so bold as to buy and clap on one of those flower-pot hats, he could have mixed inconspicuously with the crowd. As it was, the sight of a hat with a brim excited the utmost interest, and he was immediately beset by hawkers, beggars, and merchants yelling at him from their booths.

Touched momentarily by panic, he looked wildly this way and that; then, like a rabbit scared outside its burrow, he turned and scuttled back. Pink-eyed and furtive as a ferret, an Egyptian boy crept after him.

"Effendi!" A nasal, whining voice caused him to stop and peer back down the ill-lit alley.

"What is it?" he demanded nervously.

The boy came swiftly towards him out of the shadow cast by a wall. "Effendi! You want?"

"Yes, yes," Mr Tutsan said eagerly. "I want the Continental Hotel. Hôtel Continentale—you know it? Which is the way?"

The boy's skinny hand tugged at his coat. "*Aiwa. Taal.* I show you. Very much fine place." And he started to lead the way back to the bazaar.

"No, no. Continental." That strident market was too oriental even for him. Or was there a short cut that way?

"*Mush ba'id min hena.* Not far," the boy said without turning, and, kilting his tattered gown, walked quickly on.

Mr Tutsan followed reluctantly. Buffeted by the crowd through which he threaded his way, he had difficulty in keeping up, but was relieved to find that the presence of a native escort served to hold beggars and hucksters at bay. Another boy, trying to attach himself to the party, received a kick in the stomach that rolled him in the dust.

His main impression of those rows of open-fronted shops was kaleidoscopic: glimpses of coloured silks and carpets; the glint of brass and copper, of uncut semi-precious stones set out in trays; and here and there, in tones of russet and mahogany, huge sticky mounds of halwa and fresh dates. Of the people he passed he retained no recollection, except that everyone seemed to be going the opposite way. The only persons not shoving and shouting were those who sat sipping coffee in booths.

Soon there were no more shops, only square squat dwellings and far fewer people. Where a great dome blocked out a segment of the sky, the boy skipped off to the right, then

left — right — left again, into an ever-narrowing maze. Mr Tutsan halted.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded.

The boy came back and stood close to him in the semi-darkness. He was disgusting. He had a snotty nose and smelt offensively of rancid goat-butter and sweat.

"*Wahid lokanda letife.* Much fine place. You see." He struck a pose, clicked his fingers, and sketched the motions of a belly-dance.

Mr Tutsan's annoyance was partly directed against himself. He hated to feel he had been duped. "Take me to the Continental Hotel," he said, controlling his anger. "At once! You understand?"

"All right. How much?"

For him there was no alternative. He took some mixed coins, of which he did not know the value, from his pocket, and spread them on his palm, meaning to pick out a silver one of moderate size. Instantly his hand was struck down, empty. When he looked up the boy also was gone.

He stood there, pressing a hand to the bulge of his wallet. One got lost in deserts, in forests, surely not in a modern city in the year nineteen-fifty-one. Perhaps not so modern, but somewhere there must be taxis, telephones, police. "If you want to know the way, ask a policeman." The words of an old song, slightly altered, began to jig in his head. Where were they? He had not seen *one*.

He decided to make for a main thoroughfare where, if he asked often enough, someone would show him the way. Or, coming to one of those streets of seaside-looking houses, he could ring at a door and ask them to telephone for a taxi. First of all, and of this he was certain, he must return to the other side of the bazaar.

Right — left — right again. Reversing the order of turnings correctly, he followed the way they had come, but, missing the last one and going straight on, came out at the back of the great domed building he had seen. It looked like some kind of palace. It might be a cinema, he thought. And that blank wall towering above him was as good a place as any, with no one in sight. Yielding to a summons of nature, he stood for a minute facing the wall, then moved on round it.

Mr Tutsan had defiled a mosque.

He did not realise this till, turning a corner, he saw high colonnades, rows of red and yellow slippers, and people passing in and out. Then imagination, and a book he had read, took charge. He began to sweat with alarm. Suppose someone had seen him! He saw himself chased by a mob, being overtaken, and the beating and mutilation that would leave him dying in the dust. The taste of it was in his mouth, their yells in his ears, as he turned into a side-street at random, and hurried away.

The street he had entered ran

straight as the edge of a ruler. It was not wide, but it had a broken pavement on one side, and the high, thick walls that enclosed it were recessed to take heavy cedarn doors. Iron-bound, sometimes deeply and elaborately carved, they were evidently the secret portals of secluded Muslim homes — an Eastern touch that Mr Tutsan was in no mood to enjoy. He was still so disturbed in mind as almost to be afraid of his shadow. Where lamps, bracketed to the wall at long intervals, shed a weak light, it crept up palely behind him and seemed to pause, before striding on, gigantic, into the darkness ahead—the shadow of a small man bobbing along in a dented hat.

Presently he grew calmer. The lane's straightness consoled him; for he felt that the longer he kept in one direction the better his chance of joining a main road. Unfortunately, when he had gone nearly a mile, it began to ascend quite steeply, which he knew could not be right. But he did not turn back, preferring to face the unknown than known dangers behind.

Soon the cracked pavement ended, the walls fell away on either side, and the lane, reduced to a dusty track, faded out among hovels and tumbled mud bricks, with something beyond them that looked like a host of white-robed figures kneeling in prayer. It was a graveyard, a vast plantation of headstones with flower-pot tops. The moon, which in its first phase and now near to setting had been unable to fathom the streets, bathed the desolate scene in a sickly, greenish light.

"*Lillah ya muhsin! Ya ma ente kerim!*" These cries rose almost at his feet, where a group of men crouched round a dying fire. He glanced down at them, saw by their rags and twisted limbs that they were beggars, and walked quickly on. At once they were after him, moving faster than he in spite of their deformities, some skittering sideways like crabs, some seeming to throw themselves along the ground. He fumbled for the remaining coins in his pocket and flung them down. The beggars scrambled after them, yelping and snarling like dogs. Then real dogs came.

They came at him from among the tombs, a whole savage pack. They were huge, repulsive, monstrous, some were hairlessly pink, and their low steady growling was inaudible until they were close. Mr Tutsan, turning to run, saw a pebble and picked it up. He threw it among them with all his force. It found a mark. The animal's howling discouraged all but two of the rest. He flung his stick at them and ran.

He kept on running, dodging among the graves, not knowing whether they followed or not, until, glancing back, he tripped, and, in falling, struck his head on a slab of stone.

It was not a heavy blow. It did not stun him, but he lay a long time, just as he had fallen,

recovering his wind. When he stirred, it was to push his fingers among his thinning hair. "I'll have a bruise there to-morrow," he thought.

Tomorrow? Suppose he lay there till dawn, would daylight make it any easier to find the way? So great a weariness crept into his limbs that the ground seemed to yield beneath their weight. Why had the Ministry sent him? Wrong sort of person. No experience of the world. And this city . . . sordid . . . inhospitable. . . . His eyelids drooped. He slept.

When he awoke, stiff and but little refreshed, the night appeared darker. By touching the hands of his watch, he made out the time to be twenty to twelve. It took him some time to find his hat, which had rolled behind a tomb. After that, rather more hopefully, he made a plan.

His flight from the dogs had brought him to the other side of the cemetery, where the ground sloped steeply down, so that he now overlooked a wide section of the city, seen hazily as a mass of dark prisms threaded by strands of light. Those were main streets, of course; and nearer at hand, black rifts between blocks of flat-topped houses showed where unlighted alleys ran.

He studied the view like a map. From a point below where he stood, one of the rifts cut straight as a knife to join obliquely the nearest bright strand. The distance looked less than a mile. He gazed up at the stars, which, now that the moon had set, were shining with undimmed lustre. There, high in the north, was the Plough, with one of its pointers marking the very spot. If the alley led him astray, he would still have it as a guide.

He found the entrance quite easily. It looked uninvitingly dark, but the downhill trend and even surface helped him along at a pace. Once, in a narrow place, an old man thumping his way with a stick pushed roughly past him. Perhaps he was blind. And later, warned by the rhythmical tap of a drum and torchlight licking the walls, he stepped into a doorway to let others go by.

They passed him at a trot, singing, their slippers clapping their heels, and they carried a burden whose shape, and the sickly odour floating behind it, told him what it might be. After that, he met no one. The way seemed endless, and he was growing uneasy again, when he came to the beginning of a pavement. Then wall-lamps appeared, and ahead, as at the end of a tunnel, a brighter patch of light. He saw someone cross it, a bicycle flash by. He had reached a main road at last.

It was not in a prosperous part of the city. The road ran straight and wide under tall arc-lights, but the shops and houses that flanked it were as mean and shabby as the few people walking or idling there. There was little traffic: some cyclists, and occasionally a kind of open-work bus, which rattled over

pot-holes and was packed with passengers inside and out. A wind, smelling of frying oil, lifted dust and litter from the street in tepid gusts.

Turning left along the pavement, Mr Tutsan began to ask the way. "Continental Hotel?" A fat man, wearing a black alpaca gown and round embroidered cap, stared at him without replying and continued on his way. Two young men approached. They were dressed in pin-stripe suits, yellow shoes, and the usual flower-pot hats; types, he supposed, of what were called "young effendis."

They stopped at his question. "Continental? Yais. All right," one of them said, smirking. "Straight on. Nothings to pay." A burst of laughter, after they had passed, told Mr Tutsan that he had been directed the wrong way.

"If you want to know the way, ask a policeman." The tune kept time with his footsteps. There were no police anywhere that he could see. But here, travelling fast, was a car driven by a chauffeur in uniform. He stepped to the curb and waved. The man, waving back, sped on.

He stood there hopelessly, looking each way. A bus? No, it was another car, and in it were four Europeans. And they were British; yes, he was sure they were. His heart leapt with relief. He darted into the road, signalling urgently, too urgently, for them to stop. He saw their faces, like stop-go discs, all turn his way, then turn back towards each other, grinning. Clearly they thought him drunk.

"Excuse. Excuse. You look something, my sir?" The man addressing him was outside a café, watering some wilted orange plants in tubs. He had a sallow face, a dog's brown eyes, and two brush-strokes on the upper lip. Was he Egyptian, Syrian, Greek? Mr Tutsan could not tell. Whenever he saw a flower-pot hat, the word Levantine came to mind.

"Yes, yes," he said eagerly. "I have lost my way. Can I telephone from here for a taxi?"

The man pouted his lips while shaking his head.

"Then, where is the nearest Police Station? I'll ring up from there."

"It may be."

"What do you mean? Why not?"

"May be they not agree. May be nobody there. This night students is making hanky-panky some place. Many police go." He smiled tolerantly. "Very bad boys. Even they break window if examinations too hard."

"Well, can you tell me how to . . ."

The man took him by the arm. "Please to enter. We soon arrange."

The café was a single room, small and unsavoury. There was a battered coffee-urn in a corner, and some bottles containing brightly coloured liquids on a shelf. The table-tops were greasy, the low ceiling was peppered with sleeping flies.

"And now, my sir, I bring you coffee. Yes? Be sitting down, please."

Wearily Mr Tutsan expressed a wish for something stronger. Fatigue had produced a slight tremor in his limbs.

The man fluttered his hands. "Not possible. Now is Ramadan; Musulmans here very strict. Not possible at all." He leant over the table, regarding his customer closely. "You tire, I think? Perhaps long times you miss the road."

Mr Tutsan shied away from a gust of oniony breath. The coffee was grey and tasted filthy; after one sip he pushed it away.

"You not like? I hot you some more. Yes? No?"

"I only want you to tell me the way to the Continental Hotel."

"All right. How much you give me?"

Yes, he would pay something. With that comfortable hotel bedroom in prospect, the information was worth quite a lot. He felt generous. Without taking his wallet from his pocket, he slipped out a note and held it up. "I will give you a pound," he said.

The man shook his head. "Not possible. Two pound. No less."

Sudden rage seized Mr Tutsan. He began to splutter and talk at a great rate.

"Gently, my sir! Gently! We just make small arrangements. You give me two pound; I show you the way. But . . ." He flung wide his arms. "But I no charge for the coffee. Not one halfpenny piece."

"One pound or nothing," Mr Tutsan said firmly.

The man's eyes narrowed. "All right." He took the money. "Now come!"

He led his customer outside and pointed. "Keep on, please. One, two, three street, you pass them. At number four street you go left, and there is hotel. Is far a little. But easy; no trouble, my sir, at all."

"And there isn't a Police Station nearer?"

"Not even a half of one."

Mr Tutsan started off, then turned back. "What is the word for police? The Egyptian, I mean."

"*Bulis. Bulis,*" the man called after him. "Nearly almost the same."

He walked slowly, not knowing how far he would have to go. Quite soon he came to a small concrete building where a man slept under the portico, entirely wrapped in his cloak. A public lavatory, he supposed in passing. The Arabic inscription carved on the lintel reminded him of snakes. He went on a long way, encouraged by the road's less shabby appearance, and had crossed over three of the streets when it occurred to him that that porticoed building might have been something quite else. But he had come too far to turn back, was too tired to act wisely. At last he reached the fourth turning. It was a cul-de-sac.

At the sight of that blank, impassable wall he nearly cried

out aloud. He retraced his steps, went on, and without clear purpose, took the next turning to the left.

Here, looming dimly, were the high shuttered mansions he had come to think of as seaside houses; here also, though the time was after midnight, was some hope of obtaining help. For some reason, perhaps the tall green jalousies, he had the idea that the people living there were French. What he could not know was that, with the hot weather beginning, many of them had moved to the coast.

Short flights of steps led up to doors without knockers. He pulled out an old-fashioned bell-handle and heard a distant jangling sound. He waited. Nobody came. He tried another house, and then another. He rang again and again. And each time tinkling echoes brought to his ear a mocking assurance that no one would come. In growing desperation he sat down on a doorstep and rested his head in his hands.

Someone passed by—slip-slap of slippers on stone. And as the sound dwindled there came to him the conviction that here was his last hope slipping away. He sprang up and stumbled down on to the pavement. A tall striding figure was still in sight. He saw him pass under a lamp and turn his head, as though aware of footsteps behind. The next moment, as suddenly as if a trap-door had opened beneath him, the man was gone.

Something seemed to break in Mr Tutsan. Panic gripped him as he ran to the place where the man had vanished and saw a gap between the houses—the opening of a long dark passage, unpaved and felted with dust. In it he glimpsed a white figure receding, the flutter of a gown.

He dashed in pursuit, running with one arm outstretched as though to hold the man back. His feet in the dust made no sound. He tried to cry "Stop!" but breathlessness swallowed the word. At last overtaking him, he clutched at a wing of his gown. "*B-bulis*," he gasped out, hardly knowing what he said. "Please. Please can . . ."

The man swung round instantly, whipping the gown from his grasp. His right hand, darting from its folds, struck Mr Tutsan hard in the ribs, low down. His slippers slip-slapped staccato, as he fled.

Mr Tutsan heard someone groaning, and presently discovered that it was himself. Except for a nervous twitching, he lay a long time without movement, sprawled on the ground. "Like a dog—a dog in a ditch," he kept muttering over and over again. Then, loudly and clearly, he spoke the word "Knife!"

He pressed a hand to the pain in his side. Was it better that the thing had been withdrawn? He got on to hands and knees, crept to the wall, and propped himself up against it. With trembling fingers he unbuttoned his waistcoat and the top of his trousers, and slid his hand up under his shirt. The skin felt

wet and warm. He withdrew his hand, peered at it, and felt again. There was no wound in his body, only sweat on his hand.

He was a long while groping for his glasses, which had fallen some distance away. "Knocked the stuffing out of me," he murmured when, staggering slightly, he was on his feet again. He walked on slowly, moving like one in a trance, and was still in that state when, emerging from the passage, he found himself back in the square—the square where the coffee-shop stood and a man had spat on his shoe.

The place was now deserted. On the opposite side was a choice of streets, but remembering where the left-hand one would lead him, with little hesitation he chose the middle one of the three. Still dazedly, still holding his body rigid, as though prepared for the shock of finding he dreamed, he crossed over two streets of shuttered houses, then another, and saw lights and the public garden ahead. Where the trees cast the deepest shadows, he sank down on a bench.

It was as if his mind were cut off from communication with his body, for he could not control the trembling in his limbs. Realisation that he was safe came slowly, and only then did the shaking cease. After that he was content to remain where he was, watching the moving lights of cars, listening to the confusion of sounds in a street still busy at that hour. The lights grew blurred. Suddenly tears were flowing down his cheeks, misting his glasses, falling on his hands. He sat quite still, relaxed, letting them flow.

A clock struck one. Mr Tutsan wiped the moisture from his spectacles, stood up, and, having removed his jacket for the purpose, brushed himself down. That done, he walked steadily back to the hotel.

He had hoped to reach his room unobserved, but the Americans, back from the cabaret, were in the lounge. They all seemed to address him at once.

"Why, look who's here!"

"We're lining up for a last drink. You are just in time."

"My, but you look tired—and dusty."

He sat down, and, when a drink was brought, drained it at one draught.

"The room-clerk said you were out," one of the women remarked. "We all were wondering if you'd got lost."

Lost? Mr Tutsan patted the top of his head humorously. "I have an excellent bump of locality," he said.

FAREWELL TO ASCENSION.

BY A. G. BEE.

I.

I READ a story by a distinguished Naval writer. One good seaman says therein: "Just a rock it is with a few inhabitants you can hardly tell from the goats, except the goats walks on all fours."

This of Ascension! But the story has brought back memories, I being one of the said near-goats long ago, of high renown among all the other goats both quadruped and biped, because, I suppose, I loved the place, and was happier there than anywhere.

An eminent American journalist, who knows all things and says so (and I do not blame him for it; for how can one be a journalist otherwise?), said that we had only one drinking-place on our island for refreshment when toiling thereon. This was on a pipe-line between Green Mountain and the Garrison, and was called "God-be-thanked," which we shortened to "Godby." (My South African farm of thirty years later has a post at the gate with "GODBY" painted on it in white, and I get letters addressed to "Goodbye" and "Gadby," and swell amidships on receipt of such letters like the retired Colonel which I am not.)

The journalist forgot Dampier's Spring. I sat there many a time with a few dead rabbits on the grass, listening to the water bubbling from the rock through ferns, wondering if I should get pick and spade and dig for the pirate's treasure. Dig for treasure trove! For Governmental approbation and confiscation! Not I! It is said to be buried somewhere round about. Perhaps the Americans found it. They garrisoned the island, I believe, during the late war.

I share with the Emperor Napoleon and Robinson Crusoe experience of maligned islands. The Emperor was placed upon what, so I was told as a schoolboy, is a bleak and barren mass and nothing more, but which is indeed green and beautiful. In the general jumpiness following his capture, Tristan da Cunha was occupied and watched as well as St Helena, and Ascension Island became H.M.S. *Ascension* for a century.

I reached that solid stone frigate in what may seem a strange way to some folks. In 1920 or thereabouts many of us were restless, and I left the Navy for a while. I engaged in medical adventures in the Northern Transvaal, but no one paid bills in the bushveld, so I, by means divers and peculiar, was sent to Ascension Island

to join the Eastern Telegraph Company of happy memory at honourable emolument, going from the bush to the island straightly and without fuss. The Navy was still there. It greeted me in customary fashion.

"Busted pill-merchant, are you? Come and have a noggin," and guided me gently to a pleasant Club they had. I heard upon the jetty a familiar sucking sound, as of tongues upon dentures, not too loud, not too determined, not too emphatic in disapproval, a friendly, philosophic suck, and I heard a voice say, "Gaw blimey!—'ere 'e is again!" I looked round into the face of a three-badge able seaman.

"What ship and where?" I said, "and what did I do to you?"

He told me, and I hurried to the Club under a full head of steam. We had been in destroyers together, and he remembered many things.

There was a clock above the Club verandah, and as I sat there with some Naval Officers and a long John Collins, the clock struck. It said "Oh, Gawd! Oh, Gawd!" before it chimed the hour, "Oh, Gawd! *Oh*, Gawd!" four times. The Surgeon Lieutenant-Commander looked up, gurgling happily above his glass.

"Don't you believe it," he said. "It lies!"

This wasn't a bad place, they said—nothing to worry anyone, except, maybe, long-suffering tradesmen far away. Mails came from England once monthly, quite often enough, and sometimes went on to St Helena, because the "rollers" would allow nothing to land. Their wives were there too, in pleasant bungalows, and they paid no duty upon any refreshment.

But the Navy's days were numbered upon the island. Everyone and everything was under the axe in 1922, hewn down and cast aside. The fiat had gone forth. Ascension was expensive. The King's enemies had been beaten, lying down lamb-like and loving beside a tattered, benevolent lion, lapping milk, as it were, from the same saucer; the wolves and the jackals were lambs now and would bite no more. There was no further need of watch-towers upon the South Atlantic. The telegraph operators could send their messages by the deep-sea cable, and nobody would hurt it except, maybe, the giant squid down in the depths, prowling in curious investigation.

The Commandant was thoughtful, sipping his drink on the verandah.

"What a party we should have had," he said, "if the enemy had landed. A few dozen Royal Marines, old hands all of 'em, a score or so of well-seasoned seamen and stokers, very savage, and battalion upon battalion of warlike turtles, snapping in line abreast. Overhead cover very efficient—thousands of "wideawakes" (sooty terns) flying in accurate formation, and man-o'-war birds swooping on the enemy's ears, or elsewhere, according to which

end up my Marines had happened to put him."

"Any cannons?" I asked.

"No cannons," he said, and sighed—

"Now the Garrison has got to go. What a pity!"

The Medical Officer grumbled.

"We had plenty to fight 'em with," he said. "Just look at the hospital stores—a hundred years old, some of 'em. Look at the Pil. Plumbi. (lead pills), made for the jolly boys of Napoleon's time. Put 'em in a double-barrel and you could blow a battleship to bits."

I asked them when the Garrison would go.

"We don't know. Quite a time yet. There are stacks of stores to be shipped, sold to the E.T.C., or sunk. Sometimes the blinking liner has one look at the rollers smashing up the beach, and continues pioneering to Las Palmas. Two or three months, I dare say."

I was shown the hospital. It was a sturdy building of grey stone with a verandah all round, close to the sea, and the sea beat upon the cold lava, mostly with quiet determination, but sometimes in sudden wrath, smiting the small island like an irritable grandfather obstructed by a little boy and smacking his head. For Ascension is only six miles by four, an impudent obstacle in the path of King Neptune.

Yet one can walk for hours and get lost in five minutes. We stood at the farther end of the verandah, and the M.O. pointed down a path of cinders—cinders blown from the depths when the sea swallowed a continent and left a chain of little islands, far apart, to mark the place where it was.

"That," he said, "is the mortuary." A grim place it was, and I knew it was the mortuary after the Navy had left; for I lived in it while my house was being refitted, with the door swinging on loose hinges and queer sounds coming up from Dead Man's Beach.

"Dead Man's Beach," said the M.O., "is the graveyard in current use. You know how the rollers come up here, from a few hundred yards out, suddenly from a flat calm. They came good and hearty one day, and washed out the graves—bones and things all over the place. Hence the name.

"I've never used the mortuary," he continued. "Burial must be quick here." He looked at me thoughtfully. "After all, you will be doctor, medical officer of health, and registrar of births, marriages, and deaths. You will report everything to yourself . . ."

"Excellent!" I said.

There was no theatre in the hospital, but it had a large and airy dressing-cum-consulting-room. He showed me an operating-table.

"We perform our operations on that," he said. I was not of yesterday's vintage, and inspected the article with keen interest. Yet knowing something, I did not know enough. Had I known then what I know now, that table would be among

my family heirlooms or sold to a museum for much money. It must be the only one in the world, and was part of surplus stores. It had stood in its place since the first garrison landed and built the settlement.

Made of good wood, well polished, there were rings upon its legs, and sundry ancient bloodstains upon its surface. The rings had held the lashings which checked patients' upheavals in the long ago, when a sweep of a long knife and the stroke of a saw removed a limb, and they stopped the bleeding with hot pitch.

"There!" said the M.O.

"Oh!" I said. "Show me the other one."

He had a modern table in a corner available for emergencies. But there was little surgery on the island, only a sprain, bruise, or break now and then caused by falling into caverns and holes in the "clinker" which we called the countryside, or by falling into the sea at the jetty, where the landing-steps had been designed by acrobats and contortionists, not to be emulated by the clumsy or faint of heart. Illness was rare, mostly "Ascensionitis," which is like "Gyppie Tummy," and was treated by a pleasing concoction called "Clinker Mixture."

"What happens," I asked, "when a tummy blows up and you all alone?"

"Trying," he said, "but we manage it," and added: "There is the odd bit of midwifery occasionally."

"*Oh*, Gawd!" I said, imitating the clock, that dismal timepiece—a gloomy prospect, I thought, for seafaring physicians.

We went up to the Green Mountain next morning. Here were the Naval farmer and the Royal Marine shepherds. I had never seen their like before, nor have I again, even in that great Corps which does everything. They were contented men, and to see a stalwart Marine guiding tenderly his fleecy flock was a remarkable experience.

"I was officers' servant" (the word "attendant" was not the rule in his time and he did not use it) "and wardroom corporal for years and years, and now I shepherd these 'ere sheep. Queer, ain't it?"

"A strange contrast," I said.

"There ain't much difference," he said, and turned a mahogany face to his occasions.

What a gentle end in declining years of service, after the noise of wardroom guest-nights, the clatter of the Marine "Barracks" on board ship, and the firing of heavy guns at enemies in battle! I went to see the farmer in his house. He had lived on the mountain for many years, and was the only farmer, as far as I know, ever employed by the Admiralty. He had found desolation, and left it a paradise, coming there as a young man and about to leave it as an old one. The farm, the pastures, the trees, the green upland valleys, were his darlings and his pride. He had nursed them all.

For the barren lava stopped at the foot of the mountain, and all was green thereafter. Trees grew at the little settlement more than half-way up, and flowers bloomed in abundance. Every Naval or Royal Marine officer who had commanded the establishment had done his part. Labour troubled them but little in the early days. One had caused a tunnel to be driven right through the mountain, to carry a water-pipe, it was said, although where he thought the water would come from, I could not see. The tunnel opened on the farmer's garden, but there had been a party working at either end, and underground navigation had been faulty. There was a right-angled bend in the middle. You bumped into this in pitch darkness unless you knew it; for there was a line along the wall for the guidance of passengers, and no one carried lights. I wondered how many had died in the course of this pleasing task. Probably they were brought from St Helena, and never saw that lovely island again.

The passage emerged at the top of what was called Break-neck Valley, very properly; for if caught at sundown in the driving mist, one might find oneself at the bottom of it on the edge of the broken masses of lava with its crevices, ravines, and caves, which carry no sound and where hordes of big land-crabs, red, brown, and yellow, come out for human comfort. There, also, stood the lonely cottage where a shepherd had hanged himself.

They had given every feature a name — The Devil's Punch-bowl, The Devil's Riding-school, both old craters which had boiled up when the island was heaved out of the sea; Cat Hill, Gallows Hill—all very pleasing, said an island-mate of mine, reminding him of hell. And there were Windy Corner and Windy Ravine.

"The wind blows," he said, "steadily and all the time, and if you walk all careless-like round that corner, you will be wafted to Kingdom Come—caught smack in the chest like you are when the choir strikes up in Little Bethal after a binge on tea."

There was, however, Sherry and Bitters Corner, so called because it gave one an appetite, and he approved of that.

Paths had been cut all round the mountain-side, and Windy Corner was on one of these, on Elliot's Pass, named after the officer who built it. Wild ginger grew thickly along its outer edge, giving a sense of safety, thoroughly dispelled while bouncing off the clinker a few hundred feet below. There was Rupert's Pass some distance down, and then the War Path, the lowest of all, made in the war years.

"I dunno wot for," said my friend the shepherd. "We was to chase the invadin' enemy round and round, I expects, makin' 'im all dizzy, with 'is 'ead buzzing like a bee'ive, an'

then stick 'em with baynets, all slow and dignified, with time to choose the nice spots for to stick 'em in."

There was not, never has been, nor ever shall be, beer like that in the Marine Barracks on the mountain, drunk after that tough "spadge" up the "ramps" or the "overalls." The latter went straight up and the former were cut in a series of steep lengths with thirty-nine hair-pin bends. The "Barracks" was a stout building with a clock tower, always seen through floating mist, and you reached it by an avenue of trees, with moonflowers and lilies by the way. The farmer had planted bamboos on the mountain-top and made a dew-pond, with blue water-lilies. He had imported the trees, flowers, and plants from far and near. The whole place was a monument to the work of his head and hands.

The Navy had made concrete catchments, like those at Gibraltar, to get water condensed from the eternal mist; and the water was brought down to the Garrison, known always as such although its name is Georgetown, through a chain of two or three reservoirs, which served no purpose as far as I could see, for the supply went straight through. A poor supply it was; for rain came rarely, and the mist gave it all.

I sought knowledge from a member of the E.T.C.; for there stood on the clinker between Garrison and the mountain tall wireless masts, three hundred feet high, swaying in the wind.

"So we've wireless as well as cables," I said. "One's fellow creatures sing to one by air and sea. No rest, damn it!"

"They won't work," he said. "Dead failure it was. This place is all lava and volcanic stuff, and the wind blows all the time. The Navy put 'em up, but can't pull 'em down. Too dear and dangerous, they say. There is only one old rigger on the island who will climb those masts. Look at them swaying at the top. They'll stand there till the end of time. The cable's just as quick, and doesn't make such a ruddy row."

We could not know that in but a little while wireless would rule the world and his great Company be reduced to second place. The wind blew "all the time," except when it stopped and another wind came over from West Africa, called a "Coaster," and the soul shrivelled and shrank in preparation for things to come.

The Navy shepherded me about the place while there was yet time. They showed me where the rabbits ran between holes in the clinker cliffs, wilder and harder to hit than the English bunny. The Captain of Marines had ferrets, puzzled little creatures at first, he said, among the winding rocky passages, not like comfortable burrows in soft earth. I saw our brothers the wild goats, and the good author was not so rude after all; for they were fine upstanding fellows with shining black coats, and the father goats held their heads

high, with strong horns ready for what might be. (They were much finer than we were when in due time we boarded the liners; for we wore rope-soled shoes minus the soles, hats with holes, very short "shorts" with more holes, and legs dark as the communistic soul. I do not refer to the Navy here: I would sooner accuse an Archbishop of wearing his gaiters unbuttoned.)

The present "Georgetown," well up from the beach, is a square of well-built bungalows kept clean by the steady trade winds in the sunshine. I was taken to see "Comfortless Cove." They called it "Comfort Cove" in the beginning, in grim irony.

This is what the Navy had to stand a century ago—I found, after the Service left, a series and summary of Admiralty reports lying derelict in the hospital, giving the ". . . mortality of the Squadron on the Africa Station" between the years 1820-1845, when Ascension was the health resort and refuge of fever-stricken ships. It says . . .

The fever "assailed the crew of H.M.S. *Bann*, then at anchor off Freetown. When it ceased at Ascension, only sixteen of the officers and ship's company had escaped. The total number was ninety-nine, of whom thirty-four died. On her arrival at that place [Ascension] tents were erected on shore at a distance from the garrison, all intercourse with which was interdicted. The whole of the sick, amounting in number to forty-five, were landed and placed in the tents provided for them." This was in 1823.

It remarks of the island in 1838: "Extensive collections of rain-water had been formed and gradually dried up by a powerful sun. One large pool, between twenty and thirty yards in length, and about half that breadth, formed an oblong square, on three sides of which were dwelling-houses; two of these were occupied by Portuguese prisoners from a vessel detained in the roads; they lived chiefly on half-putrid fish, the garbage and bones of which were washed down into the pool." —There is unlimited supply of fresh fish to be had by throwing a line into the sea and pulling it out again.

". . . to windward, there was a store of provisions of all kinds, into which muddy water had rushed, and filled it to the depth of six feet, forming a strange mixture of the soluble and insoluble contents."

The store emitted "a most disagreeable effluvium." I should have called it a howling stench. The Garrison, I gathered, went sick by platoons, men, women, and children. They had built the first settlement at the lowest possible level, without drainage and away from the wind, which accounts for the number of babies in the various graveyards. Fresh air was unpopular in those days.

The report continues: "The men stationed on the mountain escaped entirely."

I do not know if it is the *Bann*'s company which lies

buried at Comfortless Cove. There is a grave containing half a dozen wardroom officers. The story goes that the sick were placed in tents at this terrible place, that food and water were brought round from the Garrison in a dinghy, weather permitting, and that the dying buried the dead. The food was pitched ashore on a little beach near the camp, and the sick had to fetch it, for the boat's crew had orders not to communicate.

The way to Comfortless lay across Long Beach, which is both long and broad, and where the rollers, coming in suddenly, have been known to wash folks off it from a hundred yards inland. A nursemaid and family of children went this way. The path winds from the beach round great clinker rocks, and you come upon the group of graves in a hollow among circled black stones, a desolate and mournful place.

The cove is a little lower down, with ledges and sea caves where the water is never silent, and where live the trigger fish, the porcupine fish, the savage Ascension congers, and shoals of black-fish sometimes, amid which the bather will not last long. A sad and lonely place in which to die.

So the Navy, in little groups of officers and ratings, lived upon Ascension and made of it the best they could, helped by the Royal Marines when anything went wrong. The early mistakes were put right, with simple hygiene, labour, and sense; for the climate is one of the healthiest and pleasantest on earth. There is no disease. The Americans, I dare say, with American solemnity, have destroyed the rats, millions of them, in houses, on the clinker, and everywhere; but they were friendly rats and clean, and only ate a chicken or two now and then. Three field mice sat on my breakfast-table every morning, and ate the crumbs, all rated Leading Mice—Algernon, Percival, and Willy.

Possibly the wild donkeys have been corralled, tamed, and sent away, twice the size of the humble domestic ass, high-stepping and free. The great plain where the wideawakes nested twice every year—and they have been found nowhere else in the world except a few at St Helena, and no man knows whither they go when breeding is over—was made into a landing-ground for aircraft. The poor bird with his half-plaintive, half-defiant cry of "Wideawake! Wideawake!" has been driven away bewildered.

The turtles, probably, flourish as before. Our turtle ration was liked greatly. Take your allotted piece, practise with it a few drop-kicks, jump on it, beat it with mallets, soak it in vinegar for a little while, and it is as the finest beef-steak. The Naval officers with whom I dined never, I think, gave me any turtle soup, and we did not know the difference between calipash and calipee, but those lumps of green fat, greatly esteemed, I believe, by aldermen, would make excellent

missiles at elections or at the meetings of those who would lead us in the paths of rectitude.

All the officers, most of the ratings and Marines, and nearly all the wives seemed happy and loath to go. The lads of the E.T.C., those ragamuffin "goats," of whom I was one, would put in, many of them, for a three-year extension after their first three years were up. The island had a fascination all its own.

Whether or not the general content extended to "Harmony Row," where warrant officers and N.C.O.s lived with their families, it is hard to say. Some of these ladies, no doubt, missed the bustle of a dockyard town or London suburb, with the string-bag and lively gossip amid the bright lights of a Saturday evening in the High Street and all the shops with wares displayed. They were like the city gentleman whom we met on board the passing liner, and who wished to go ashore to shop. He was told that passengers were not allowed ashore and that there were no shops.

"No shops!" he cried, quite aghast. "No shops! Then how do you live?"

All I could say was that there were no shops and that we continued to exist.

I fancy that the Commandant made a last despairing effort to keep the island as it was, but he had no luck. Also, I imagine that he and the P.M.O. had put in firm requests for improvements before the final order for abandonment had been issued and the sword of Damocles, Titan or Demosthenes, or whichever grim classic ruled at Whitehall, had descended upon them and their good but expensive plans. Possibly it was the sword of the first and the philosophy of the last that beat them. It seemed unwise in the stirrings of the world and the need for air bases presently. But there was to be no more war.

The Eastern Telegraph Company took over everything, and the Superintendent thereof became Magistrate and ruler of the island, under the Governor of St Helena. There was much that he could not buy from the Navy, and I saw various machinery being driven over the jetty into the "ditch." An old steamboat was taken out and sunk. Small unwanted stores were sold to anyone who would buy, and I bought pots and pans, glass and china, such china and glass as are not in Admirals' cabins or wardrooms of today.

Then I settled in my temporary dwelling, an old bungalow, until I could take over from the P.M.O. I listened to choirs of crickets singing all night, louder than any Hallelujah chorus with massed bands, and to the chamber music made by serious rats. I thought that the wideawakes, coming in by hundreds from the sea at sunset, called more mournfully than ever, "Wideawake! Wideawake!" and that the booby-birds and noddies looked sad upon the clinker. The turtle,

perhaps, were happy, chuckling at empty soup-tureens in London City, for the Navy had sent them home every year to dignified insides.

The Garrison left one morning in a bright calm. The rollers were at peace. Passengers lined the ship's rails—an intermediate ship of the Union Castle Line—wondering what place this was and what savages scampered about the mountain. But we had put on our best bibs and tuckers to see the Navy off, and were not goats that day.

The oldest residents had no best clothing. It had been eaten by cockroaches. It was silly to order new things from England just to be eaten by cynical and sarcastic beasts like these. If a man had a good hat, he lent it to a friend transferred to the Cape, and the friend's relief arrived upon the island wearing it.

I shook hands with the Commandant and the P.M.O. upon the promenade deck, and never saw them again. Down on the after well-deck the three-badge-man was saying, expressionless and glum, to a "raggy" of his: "'E'll join us again. Yus, 'e bloody-well will . . .," and then as he spotted me in the offing: "I begs yer pardon, sir." He was an old-time hand, and I wish I could have given him more than the beer he had.

I talked to the Royal Marine shepherd, mourning for his sheep. "They'll go all to hell now," he said. "W'y couldn't the damned Company 'ave taken over the old man? 'E wanted to stay, but they said 'e wos too old!"—and he spat viciously over the rail.

The "old man," the Naval farmer, stood silent, looking at the mountain, all his life-work finished.

When the ship was under way I went ashore, taking my gun deep into the clinker, in the wildest part where the goats live, and where there is no food for anyone but goats, just the scanty acacia scrub on which they thrive. King Billy, ruler of his people, stood high upon a lava rock, looking at me, and I said to him, "Go in peace!" For I looked out to sea, and there was the ship steaming home, hull-down on the horizon.

II.

Perhaps the Navy has gone back there now. In far-away South African hills one does not know these things. We were told that the Americans took over the island during the second war, but we did not know how or why; and that they had built roads and cinemas, soda-fountains, and all the amenities of modernity. The Navy had one small distilling plant which rarely worked, because it wanted too much money. Alas for Ascension!

I had been there upon my own for four months before my wife arrived plus eldest unmarried

daughter, who had seen nine moons and had travelled several thousand miles. They were unperturbed; for we can take root anywhere, until the goblins of an impish fortune dig us up again.

Then there came to our house across the deepest sea in the world a fine old gentleman, stepping ashore from a heaving boat with dignity and aplomb—the Bishop of St Helena, whom we had known before; for his diocese was St Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha, and he never missed calling at any of these, weather or no weather. He could climb a ship's jumping-ladder like a deep-sea pilot, and the fearsome landing-steps had for him no terrors.

He stayed with us until the next Cape-bound ship came from England, and buried the first and only death I had upon the island, in that strange cemetery by Dead Man's Beach, where three blow-holes send foam to the sky out of dark caverns when the rollers come roaring in, and sunlit water-columns fly up like the geysers of New Zealand.

On the first evening after dinner he sat in a big armchair we had, a very old one with straight Victorian back, high and dignified, talking thoughtfully to my wife. I was not listening, sitting "all pensive-like" and thinking of nothing, or perhaps of some bedevilment in H.M. ships. He sorrowed for the Garrison and mourned for the little church left derelict.

Something impinged upon my vacant mind. My wife's voice I think it was. The Bishop was addressing me. The church would fall to ruin, he said, after an hundred years; for there was not much interest taken in such things, and the lads of the E.T.C. were jolly heathens, more or less. But our hundred or so St Helena labourers and servants were devout folks, and would be left without comfort.

Would I take over the church, I being a Naval officer of service however brief and still on the Emergency List, see it kept clean and in order, and conduct services every Sunday.

She said I need not have let my jaw drop so far or put into my eyes the expression of a frightened sheep. The ordinary wardroom officer of any branch, especially mine, is not used to such proposals. I stuttered thanks for the honour, and remembered a desperate case in the hospital.

But I went alone next morning to the church. It was silent, uncared-for, full of dust. No one had entered it since the Navy left. There, on the walls, were memorials to forgotten men. I read through the dust—in those plain words unadorned which make English, emotionless and without verbiage, as no other language—of one who had served upon the island for ten years and then died, leaving his mark as they all did. In their time the Admiralty did not worry overmuch about personnel in far places. If an officer, of no particular pretension or importance, wished to stay there, he stayed. If he

did not wish to stay, he was likely to remain just the same. He was out of the way and no bother to anyone. The words spoke to me reproachfully in the dim light.

Therefore I sought our good Nursing Sister. My hospital orderly was impounded, with half a dozen eager St Helena-men. I gathered up some pagans from the E.T.C. Mess, and we polished that little church, making it bright and smiling, and light shone in through opened windows. The Bishop was pleased with our work, and gave me that lay reader's licence of which my wife is so proud to this day. My three pagans got one each also, and we looked at each other with doubtful faces.

"Well, well," I said, "the Garrison has gone: 'The day Thou gavest'—Give that tablet another polish, George."

On the next Sunday at evensong, the wideawakes paused in their homecoming from the sea and hushed their cry to listen to a strange sound. It was the voice of a churchful of simple Christians and four sinners singing praise to the setting sun.

The church was proud, and not neglected any more.

COTTAGE AT THE COAST.

BY J. A. K.

THE wind had dropped to an almost imperceptible breath, and the big dhow from Muscat was entering Mombasa old harbour under oars, her gleaming white sail flapping idly at her mast. The walls of the centuries-old Portuguese fort of Jesus were turning pink under the rays of the westering sun—and the bar of the Club was beginning to fill. It was that very pleasant time of day in the life of an Englishman in the tropics, when the sun is, to all intents and purposes, down, and the cry of 'Boy' is loud in the land.

I was relaxing after, if the truth be told, a not very hard day's work, in one of the long cane chairs with which the balcony of the Club is thoughtfully provided. A long glass was in my mind (its colour, when held up against the long line of surf beating on the coral reef, was æsthetically delightful) and I felt very much at peace with the world. Into my blissful ken, as I lounged there, limped old Roddy, who only escaped being labelled as the Club bore by the versatility of his stories. To exchange with him a harmless 'Good evening' was sufficient encouragement for him to launch forth into a story which would almost certainly not be finished before a minimum of three drinks, and very possibly not before bedtime. To venture a remark about the weather or the Government was fatal. Such a spate of reminiscence—true or imaginary—would be produced as would have put the Ancient Mariner completely in the shade.

However, as I have said, his stories had the virtue of versatility. And it would have been greatly to his discredit if they had not; for Roddy had, without doubt, had an unusually interesting life. Canadian-born, he had run away from school (in traditional fashion) to go fishing for seal, salmon or something around Kamchatka way. This had not proved to be so entertaining as he had anticipated, so he had gone south, *via* Japan and one or two minor Archipelagos in the Pacific, to New Zealand, where he had interested himself for a while—a very short while, apparently—in the sheep industry. This was dull, for, as he said, one sheep is so exactly the same as another; he therefore sought fresh fields for his enterprise and took boat across the Pacific to South America, where he learnt about engineering in some copper mines.

This engineering apprenticeship must have taught him a great deal in a short while; for the next stage in his story—as he relates it—is located in the island of Fernando Po, where he undertook to build a railway for the Spanish Government.

(This episode always rings untrue to me. I can never quite understand why a foreign government should engage, to build a railway in one of its few remaining Colonial possessions, a man in his early thirties whose previous interests in life have been seafaring, sheep-farming, and copper-mining. Furthermore, the only atlas I have in my bookshelves indicates that Fernando Po does not possess any railways anyway. However, he swears that what he tells is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And he has such disarming blue eyes that you are almost compelled to believe him. Almost.)

At the risk of tedium, it is interesting to pursue his career until the moment when he limped into the Mombasa Club on the evening in question. After Fernando Po had been endowed with the most modern of railway systems, he worked his way south once more, and found himself in South Africa. This country seems to have been rather too civilised for his tastes, and after a spot of trouble, one understands, over a deal in diamonds, he left for Liberia. Here he set up, of all unlikely things, as an architect, and he seems to have done very well, until one night he shot his cook during an altercation. Things might have gone badly with him had it not been comparatively easy to escape from the jail where he was held while the case was being investigated. He bribed the captain of a coasting ship to put to sea with him without delay—and we next hear of him in Dahomey, where he acted as a sort of general agent for various firms, touting their goods round from village store to village store.

It was while he was engaged in this presumably profitable peddling that war broke out, and he immediately made his way to Nigeria, where he enlisted into the Army, subsequently transferring into the Navy. In the Senior Service he soon acquired commissioned rank, and, as may be expected, had more than his fair share of adventures, culminating in a shipwreck somewhere in the Gulf of Aden and the loss of half a leg by the agency of a shark. (In passing, those people who do not altogether believe all that they are told—when Roddy is the teller, at any rate—assert that the half-leg was lost in a far more prosaic fashion when he slipped off a tram on VJ-Night in London. But whatever the truth, half a leg has certainly gone somewhere.)

After the war, he must have felt the urge for a more sedentary respectability than he had been accustomed to—and maybe the loss of his limb had something to do with it; for he settled down in Kenya as an assistant manager on a large sisal plantation. This job he held down for a couple of years or so, until the sea called him once more. Then, finally, he started up his own business in Mombasa. What this business was defies definition in a few

words; it was a mixture of so many trades and professions. For instance, he acted as agent for one or two British firms of manufacturers; he would buy and sell stocks and shares, and was ever ready to peddle insurance; he was slightly involved in the building and contracting trade, and did a fair business as a house agent. In short, he was a general factotum and one-man-band.

For once I viewed his approach on this peaceful evening with a certain welcome; my normal reaction to it would have been a rapid departure to my car and thence home. But this evening I needed his advice in his capacity as house agent. I had heard of a small cottage along the coast which was empty and rentable, and I wanted to hear of his reactions towards it.

What follows was his reply. Did I say that his style as a raconteur was by way of being prolix?

"Ah, yes," said Roddy, "the White Cottage. Now there's a very interesting story about that place. Very interesting indeed. I'm sure you'd like to hear about it. You would, wouldn't you?"

This was the sort of question which in Latin would have been prefaced by *Nonne*, since it demands the answer 'Yes.' It would have taken a braver man than I happen to be, or a ruder, to say 'No. I just want to know what the place is like'; so I bowed to the inevitable, made myself comfortable in my chair, and prepared for a Haroun-al-Raschid sort of evening.

Roddy took a deep breath, metaphorically, and launched himself into his narrative. "I first knew the White Cottage when it was owned by Judy Manners, about six years ago. I used to go there for week-ends when I first came to Kenya. In those days it was a pleasant enough little place, as these seaside cottages go. Although, even then, it had a peculiar atmosphere about it—and that, of course, was long before Judy shot herself on the sun-porch.

"I don't know, quite, what there was about the place, but there was certainly something. I think perhaps it was the setting. Let me describe it to you. You don't know it, do you?" And without waiting to draw breath, let alone give me time to answer, he went on. "It stands on a tiny little cove which breaks a long line of coral cliffs about twenty miles north of here. You turn off the main road by a tiny track which winds through the dense and rank vegetation until it comes to the edge of the cliff. It is absolutely deserted; for the locals have some sort of a superstition about the place and don't hold with it. I believe that there is a ruined city of a kind hidden away in the tangle of bush, but I've never heard it confirmed. There certainly could be, very easily; for the undergrowth is so matted and tangled that it could hide anything.

"I must qualify what I have

just said about it being deserted. It is, inasmuch as no one lives there—but at certain times of the year the tribesmen from up and down the coast come infiltrating through the bush and hold their initiation ceremonies in a grotto not very far from the cottage. It would make a much better story, naturally, if I said that the ceremonies were accompanied by human sacrifices and the like, but it wouldn't be true, of course. Not in these modern days." (I thought, 'But I'll take a bet that if he ever tells the story out of this country, where there is a chance of getting away with it, there'll be sacrifices, witch-doctors, bush-telegraph and voodoo, and all the rest of the trappings.')

"No, it was just an ordinary sort of initiation ceremony, with a bit of mumbo-jumbo, singing, drumming, unpleasantly painful little rites, and a great deal of subsequent drunkenness. But Judy didn't care for them overmuch, nevertheless. They took place, as I have said, very near her cottage, and she was quite alone there. You never knew what might happen once the beer had circulated rather too freely.

"However, there was nothing she could do about it, and there was no chance of persuading the men to use some other place for their parties; for it was apparently laid down by tribal custom that the ceremonies must be held at the grotto and nowhere else. Doubtless the reason for it went back into history, possibly to the old abandoned city. So she just had to put up with the noise and the possible consequences. And, in actual fact, nothing ever did happen to her. The suicide was quite genuine—although I admit that there was a certain amount of talk about it at the time.

"But I have rather let my tongue run away with me. I was telling you what the cottage looks like and what its surroundings are. . . .

"At the end of that enclosed little lane (it was more of a tunnel in some places) you came out, in those days, into a small clearing. In the middle of the clearing was the cottage, standing beneath a huge baobab tree. And when I say 'huge,' I mean 'huge.' Its trunk at the base was at least fifty feet in circumference, and its purplish, bloated branches overhung almost the whole clearing. You know the old native superstition that the trees are damned, and that each one harbours its own particular devil? Well, beneath that tree one was more than ready to think that there was something in the story, believe me.

"In the rather scratchy little garden which Judy had planted round her house were a flamboyant or two, a dispirited bougainvillea, and one or two Indian almonds which seemed to flourish like the green bay tree. The only things that did. The house itself was very commonplace; you know the sort of thing. Large sun-porch; dining-cum-drawing-room; couple of bedrooms; dressing-room, and that's about

all. The usual sort of seaside cottage—and quite adequate for Judy's needs, for she only spent a few weeks there every year. For the rest of the time she either lent it to her friends (that's how I went there) or it was empty in the charge of an old retainer she had imported from up-country. He was a grim and surly old man—but he had the inestimable advantage, as far as Judy was concerned, of being stone-deaf, and so fundamentally incapable of absorbing any of the stories about the place.

"In front of the house were the cliffs. A flight of steps had been cut in the coral leading down to the little sandy cove. On either side of the stretch of sand the overhanging coral cliffs were black and jaggedly sharp. They were not the kind to try and clamber about on, or under; for the points were as sharp as needles and cuts almost invariably turned septic. Beneath the overhangs were deep pools of still, black water, thick with floating seaweed, and when you went near, myriads of pink crabs used to drop from overhead, plop into the pools. Altogether, it was rather an eerie place—but the bathing from the little beach was good. The reef was about a quarter of a mile out to sea there, and between it and the shore was the usual lagoon which had several deep pools in it so that you could bathe at any state of the tide.

"And that, in a nutshell, is what the White Cottage was like when I first knew it." My intellect was getting numbed with verbosity, but I still, to my credit, had the presence of mind not to murmur 'What a nutshell!'

With the air of a bard of old about to start off on the second chapter of a saga, Roddy drew a deep breath and continued. "After Judy shot herself that New Year's Eve on the sun-porch—and that makes an interesting story in itself; remind me to tell you about it one day; not half of the story was made public, you know—I stopped going to the cottage, and I never went near the place again until one day a few months ago. And then I had the shock of my life.

"The old track was even more overgrown than I had remembered it; there was long grass growing in the wheel-tracks and the bush had encroached on either side of it. If I hadn't known the way so well in the past I would have doubted whether I was on the right road. As it was, I began to wonder if it would be passable for my car—and if I hadn't been going out to the place on business I would probably have turned back.

"However, at last I reached the old clearing which I had once known so well. The baobab was still there, of course, as bloated and evil-looking as ever. It happened to be the time of year when it was bare of all leaves, and some of the bladder-like fruit was hanging down among its twisted branches. Beneath it the scratchy little

garden was now a tangled wilderness. Twisted and contorted bushes from the jungle had strangled nearly everything that Judy had planted and tended (more or less) only a few years previously. Practically the only things that visibly retained their identity were the Indian almonds, which still thrived in the matted shrubbery. Treading carefully because of snakes (they love this rank undergrowth, you know, and the dead coral which it grows on), I walked across the former garden towards the cottage.

"As was only to be expected after nearly five years of desertion (did I say that no one had lived in it since Judy's suicide?), it was not in a very good state of repair. The *makuti* roof had sagged in several places, and over the sun-porch, I could see as I walked up, it had fallen through completely. The walls of the cottage, too, which in the old days had gleamed with whiteness, were dirty and stained —and the front door was hanging from the bottom hinge only. As I climbed the steps up into the porch a miserable cat, wild as a hawk, went streaking past me, back hunched and tail in the air. I imagine it was a descendant, much adulterated, of Judy's old favourite Persian, called Omar, run wild and living upon what it could find in the bush.

"I pulled the door open and stepped inside. The acrid smell of bats was almost thick enough to cut with a knife, and the floor was deep with their droppings. I looked up, and there were quite a couple of hundred of them, I should say; no, more; hanging from the ragged *makuti* by their toes. Now I don't care for bats overmuch at any time or in any place, I learnt too much about them in South America, once—but that's another story, as well. Remind me to tell you that one, too, one day. It really was quite extraordinary. . . . As I say, I don't care for bats—and these quite upset me, I don't mind admitting it. Hanging there upside down, in black swarms, quite motionless and utterly revolting—ugh! Doubtless the smell had something to do with it as well—and the story of poor Judy's suicide. But I was quite upset, believe it or not, and for a moment thought of beating it out of that broken-down front door as quickly as I could.

"But I stopped myself. 'Roddy, old boy,' I said to myself, 'Roddy, steady now. You've got a job of work to do here, and these bats are harmless anyhow.' So I took a pull at myself, and looked round the darkened dining-room. And what I saw made me wish to Heaven that I had obeyed my impulse to get right out of the house in the first place. The floor, the walls, even the ceiling, were spattered and soaked in blood.

"It was too much for me, in the state in which I had worked myself up into." (I made a mental note that Roddy was a true story-teller, becoming all excited with his climaxes—even

to the point of forgetting his grammar. As if to confirm me in this opinion, he proceeded to split an imperial infinitive.) "I screwed up my courage to fearfully and timorously look into all the other rooms to see if there might be a body or a weapon or some other clue lying about, and then I frankly got the hell outside as quickly as ever I could. And what a relief it was to be out in the open air once more—even if the open air was polluted by the influence of that accursed baobab, and doubtless by its resident little devil.

"Going back home, I wondered what to do about what I had seen. And this is perhaps the oddest thing about my whole story. I turned over plan after plan—but never thought of the obvious one, of going to the police and handing everything over to them. What made me forget this so utterly obvious a course, I can't imagine. It was just one of those things that happen every so often. Perhaps it's a sort of absence of mind. I wouldn't know. But whatever it is, I didn't even begin to consider going to the police. I thought of a dozen other plans, but never that.

"I thought of doing no more about it whatsoever, and trying to put the whole thing out of my mind, even to the extent of pretending to myself that I had never really been out to the cottage at all and that I had dreamed the whole thing. Another equally impossible idea I had was to go back to the cottage and burn it to the ground with all its associations—for by now I had quite convinced myself that it must be haunted.

"In the end, what I decided to do was this. And if it sounds improbable, I can't help it; it was, but it was what really happened. I decided to do, in effect, nothing. Not to forget about it altogether—that would, as I have just said, have been quite impossible—but to relegate it to the back of my mind. Every so often I could pull out the mystery, so to speak, and meditate upon it, and then, when I was tired of it for the time being, I could slip it away out of sight again.

"That was what I decided to do. But it wasn't easy to carry out, not nearly as easy as I had thought. After a few weeks I found the problem was beginning to thrust itself increasingly to the fore. Try as I could, I just could not keep it where I wanted it, at the back of my mind. The servant was becoming the master, and my ordinary work began to suffer. I kept on turning over possible solution after possible solution, and making surreptitious inquiries to see if I could discover whether anyone was known to be missing who might have been the murdered person—for I was quite convinced by now that there had indeed been a murder. But, of course, all my inquiries were quite fruitless, and at the end of a month I still knew no more of what had occurred in that ramshackle

cottage beneath the baobab tree than I had done when I first went into those bloodstained rooms.

"In the end, I decided to take Harry MacInnes into my confidence. As you know, he is a fairly level-headed sort of chap—as well as being one of my oldest friends—and I thought that he might well be able to help me. One night at the Club here I told him all about it—and, as I had known he would, he offered to help.

"After discussion, we agreed that the best, in fact the only, thing to do was to pay another visit to the cottage. And we decided to strike while the iron was hot and go out there the following afternoon.

"Harry had never been there before, and long before we even reached the end of the track I could see that he wasn't liking it too much. It may have been the effect of what I had told him, or it may have been that touch of second sight which he shares with so many Scots, but he became thoroughly apprehensive, more and more so as we drew nearer to the clearing, down that rankly overgrown chasm between the walls of solid bush. When we came out at last into the clearing beneath the baobab tree, in spite of the heat and oppressiveness of the afternoon, he was overcome with an uncontrollable shivering, just as if he had a go of malaria.

"Things were just the same there as when I had left in such a hurry six weeks before. The roof was falling in, the door was still hanging on its hinge, and when we stood on the threshold there was the same bitter, pervasive stench, and the bats were still hanging from the roof. I looked back at Harry to see how he was taking it, and when he nodded to show that he was all right, I moved on. What we expected to find, I don't really know; but I suppose I, at any rate, imagined that things would be exactly the same as they had been when I was last there. Perhaps I had an idea that we might even find a body, or bits of one, which I had overlooked—but I would like to put it on record, here and now, that I had never dreamed for one moment that we would find what we did. Had I done so, wild horses would never have dragged me back to the cottage."

Here, Roddy, with the instinct of the true story-teller, broke off to call for a drink and to light his pipe. Before the necessary rites had been performed, quite five minutes had elapsed and I must admit that, for almost the first time since I had known him, I was anxious to hear the sound of his voice. And that, believe me, is praise indeed.

"That room," he continued at last, "was even more blood-bespattered than it had been before, and the stains were fresh. Where six weeks ago I had thought in terms of one murder, now it looked as if there must have been several. It was utterly appalling, and I was horrified beyond words.

And so was poor Harry, who looked as if he had seen a company of ghosts.

"But this was nothing ghostly; it was something far more material. We decided that we must do our best to find out what it was all about. If I had been by myself, I am not at all sure that I wouldn't have done what I had done before; that is, get out into the fresh open air just as quickly as ever I was able. But the company of Harry made all the difference—as I think mine did to him—and, steeling ourselves, we looked around.

"We were soon able to reconstruct what had happened. It all seemed horribly obvious. In the bedroom adjoining the dining-room there were more bloodstains, but not nearly so widespread as in the dining-room. Just a few stains in one corner on the floor, leading in a trail towards the broken-down door, and getting ever more profuse the nearer they got to the outer room. There they were as they had been on my previous visit, covering everything. It appeared to me to be quite obvious what had happened; the victim, whoever it might have been, had been assaulted initially in the bedroom, where the first blood was drawn. He, or she, had made a dash for safety into the dining-room, doubtless in the hopes of getting out into the open and perhaps escaping altogether, but had been overtaken by the murderer before getting far. Here, around where the dining-table had once stood, the crime had been completed, and from the looks of things the murderer had hacked his victim about with sadistic ferocity. Oh, yes. It was all too horribly obvious what had happened."

Here I felt bound to interrupt—and Roddy had in fact broken off his monologue as if to allow me to do so. There was a palpable flaw in the narrative, it seemed to me, and I wanted to have it cleared up. As it was, the story just didn't hold water.

"Tell me," I said, "one thing. I don't quite understand. . . . You said that on this second visit you found the original bloodstains increased, and that the new ones were fresh. That is correct, is it not?"

"Yes," said Roddy, apparently not at all put out at being interrupted.

"Well, then . . . you say you were able to reconstruct the crime in the way which you have just described. Do you mean to say that you thought that two murders had been carried out in this cottage in precisely the same fashion? Surely, that seems rather improbable?"

Roddy said, "Thank you. I was hoping that you might pick me up on that point. It shows that you are taking a proper interest in what I am telling you. You would be surprised if I told you how many people, when I am telling this story, don't notice the flaw, and then I have to go back and explain it all to them. Yes,

you're quite right. Something was obviously wrong with my reconstruction. A succession of people would most certainly not allow themselves to be made victims of a homicidal maniac in an isolated and bloodstained cottage by the sea. No, we would have to think again.

"It was Harry, as a matter of fact, who thought of what I believe to be the true, correct, and final solution. He thought it up while we were still out there that afternoon. Almost as soon as we had reconstructed the crime by following the bloodstains we realised our error, and knew that the solution would never hold water. 'Well,' we said, 'if that answer is wrong, then what is the right one? Bloodstains like this don't just happen. There must be a reason for them—and it's up to us to find out what the reason is.'

"So we went out into the clearing underneath the baobab tree and sat down in the car while we tried to figure things out. We discussed the matter inside out, upside down and all ways, and all at once Harry said, 'I've got it. Initiation ceremony, that's what it is.' He then elaborated on the theory, basing it on the facts as we knew them. When he had finished, the story worked out something like this.

"As we knew, the local tribesmen had used the coral grotto near the house for their initiation ceremonies since time immemorial. Well, for some reason—perhaps something to do with the gruesome story of Judy's suicide—they had decided to forsake the ways of their fathers and carry out the rites in the deserted and ramshackle cottage. They may have thought that the connections of the suicide would give added potency to the ceremony. I don't know; but it seems a reasonable proposition.

"This theory would seem to explain everything; the recurrent bloodstains (for what they do in these ceremonies is pretty messy), the trail of stains leading from one room to the next (although we were wrong in our first reconstruction; for the dining-room was obviously where the first blood was shed and the victim went from there into the bedroom, where the dressings were applied); and the absence of any rumours of person or persons missing, believed killed. Oh, yes; it all fitted perfectly. And I am quite sure that it is the true answer.

"However, although we were quite certain (and we still are, for that matter, in spite of what came after) that we had reached the bottom of the mystery, we agreed to round it all off properly, and confirm our theory with the evidence of our own eyes. Consequently, we made up our minds that at the next full moon (which was the time of month when we understood these ceremonies were accustomed to be held) we would have a good look ourselves and see what went on.

"We decided that the best thing to do would be to park the car some way away from the cottage, and walk the last

mile or so, to make quite certain that we wouldn't disturb anyone. For, naturally, we did not want anybody to know of our presence; for these ceremonies are, as you know, by way of being pretty secret, and it would spoil the whole thing if we went roaring straight into the middle of the party in the car. I admit we'd have got the proof we needed, but we both thought that while we were at it we might just as well have a look at the ceremony itself—a thing which very few white men have ever seen.

"So on the night in question—which was only last week—we set out. We were fully equipped for an all-night vigil—and just in case our presence was detected and resented to a high degree—as it probably would be if we were found—we both carried revolvers. I don't hold with that sort of thing in the normal way nowadays, but it seemed a wise precaution that night.

"We drove the car right off the road into a clearing where it was quite out of sight to the casual passer-by; for we would probably not be the last people to pass along the track that night. By now, it was well after dark, and the moon was riding high in the sky. Everything was as still as the tomb, and just as eerie. I remember that we heard a monkey scream in fright (possibly it had been taken by a leopard), but that was about the only sign of life there was.

"Fortunately the full moon gave a light almost as strong as daylight. The upper surfaces of the leaves on all the trees were silvered, and the shadows on the ground were black. The whole scene looked like a life-size silver-point etching (if that's what I mean. You know, anyhow.) It was, I suppose, beautiful—but we were in too excited a mood to be æsthetically appreciative. There is certainly some supernatural aura about that cottage and its surroundings; I don't know what it is, but I definitely wouldn't recommend any imaginative type to go and stay there.

"At last we came out of our enchanted wood into the clearing, where the silvered baobab looked twice as immense as it did by daylight. The whole place seemed to be absolutely deserted—but we thought it prudent to make a reconnaissance before assuming for certain that it was so. We therefore carefully walked up to the cottage and peered in at the broken windows. Not a thing. So we thought we would look inside. I pulled open the front door on its broken hinge—and as I did so, two things happened."

True to his craft, Roddy stopped again here for the ostensible purpose of taking refreshment. He really was a most provocative man, and had studied to good purpose the technique of 'see next week's number for another thrilling instalment.' But on principle I refused to encourage him by pressing him to go on, and after

a silence which can only be described as pregnant, he once more went into action—nothing daunted, even if perhaps a little disappointed.

"As I was saying, two things happened. The first was that a large black shape as big as a kite went blundering past my head, so close that I could smell its fœtid odour and feel the breath of its wings. I jumped a yard—and if it hadn't been for Harry I reckon that the night's expedition would have been still-born. The two of us together kept up each other's spirits and determination. Neither of us was able to identify what the creature was—but I suppose it might have been an owl. It was too dark inside the door after the dazzling moonlight to be able to see anything distinctly at first, and anyhow it was all over too suddenly.

"Well, that was the first thing; the second was that a door at the back of the house slammed. Now, that may not sound much, but coming at precisely the same moment as the other incident, it rattled us badly. It might have signified that someone in the house was leaving at the back as we came in at the front, or it might have been caused by the slight breeze which had just sprung up. It must have been one of those two things—and was probably the latter. A supernatural explanation we refused to countenance, apt as this might appear to us in our somewhat overwrought state.

"After a rather self-conscious pause on the threshold (where, I couldn't help remembering, Judy's body had been discovered on that New Year's Day five years ago), we went into the house. We had decided that it would be unwise to shine a torch, but the moonlight flowing in through the windows was strong enough for anything we wanted—which was really only to confirm that everything was as we had left it.

"It was, precisely the same. Or was it? In the shadows it appeared to us as if there were, once again, fresh stains on the walls and floor of the dining-room. We strained our eyes to see if this was really so—and then we heard the drums.

"Quite close—near enough, anyhow, to drown the beat of the surf on the reef—they throbbed. Up and down, strong then weak, loud then soft, they pulsed. In the silver-barred light coming through the shuttered window Harry and I looked at each other. It seemed to indicate that our theory was going to be confirmed. It also indicated that the sooner we made ourselves scarce, out of the cottage, the better it would be. It was difficult to judge just how far away they were, or in what direction. It is never easy to do that, with drums, and it is absolutely impossible when one is surrounded by thick bush. The sound is blanketed here and magnified there, and the more you concentrate the more confused you get, until it seems as if you are sitting in the middle of concentric circles

of drummers. The best thing for us to do was to assume that they were really very near indeed, and to get outside at once. Which we did—and went to ground in a patch of dense bush which had grown up around some frangipani. There we awaited events. We had the moon behind us—for the time being, anyhow—a good view of the front entrance of the cottage, and we were so deeply embedded in greenery that it was fair to expect that we would be able to watch the night's proceedings without discovery.

"The drums continued to beat, the rhythm sometimes becoming slower, sometimes speeding up in a mad crescendo, but all the time (it seemed to us) drawing steadily nearer. The rhythm was insidious, infectious. Both Harry and I are pretty hard-boiled, but we both felt an almost uncontrollable urge to burst from our cover into the clearing and leap about in some sort of primitive caperings. Maybe it was the moon; maybe it was the influence of that bewitched baobab; maybe it was just the drums and nothing else; I wouldn't know, but there I was, wooden leg and all, having the devil of a job to prevent myself from doing something which at best would be damned foolish and at worst might be downright dangerous.

"And still the drums went on. And on, and on. Then suddenly, after a long burst of frenzied beating, they stopped. Altogether. The drums themselves may have been menacing, but it was nothing to what the silence was. The night seemed vast and full of mystery around us—and it wasn't only the cold breeze which made us shiver. Where, we asked ourselves, were the drummers now? Were they even now filing into the clearing in some place where we couldn't see them. Perhaps just behind us? Had our car—or even our presence—been discovered? If so, had the report of this from some scout caused the cessation of the drums? And again, if so—what was going to happen next?

"We strained our eyes at the shadows—and the more they strained the more the shadows moved and crept across the clearing. We strained our ears, and they heard whisperings and shufflings beneath the bushes. The whole night was full of menace and fear. And it was too much for Harry and me. With our hands on our revolvers, we crept away from our hiding-place and the sickly, cloying scent of the frangipani blossoms.

"We went *ventre-à-terre*, literally, across that clearing, with our hearts most indecently high up in our mouths. Remembering all our jungle-craft and lore, we felt for places to put our hands and knees before putting our weight on them, and we made sure that no twigs broke or leaves crackled. And believe me, I don't recommend one little bit this method of progression when you are crossing coral. By the time we had got out of the clearing on to the track our trousers were torn to

shreds and so were the palms of our hands. It was like crawling through a field of broken glass—but it was worth it. We got out unnoticed (assuming that we were in fact being searched for), and once we were a little way down the road we got to our feet and went off at a better pace. It was tempting to break into a trot—but panic lay that way, and the trot would soon have turned into a canter and the canter into a gallop—so we restrained ourselves to a brisk walk, with one eye fairly permanently looking over the shoulder.

"We got to the car without mishap—and that was the end of that evening's entertainment. Quite enough it had been, too. And that is really the end, too, of my story. I haven't been out to the cottage again since—and, quite frankly, I'm not awfully keen on doing so. What I have done, though, in my capacity of land agent, and as I am responsible for letting the place, is to put in a watchman sort of chap. He is, or looks, first cousin to that one Judy had in the old days. A surly, highly unintelligent fellow from up-country, whose instructions are to live on the place, not to go away from it, and to report to me any unusual incidents which come to his notice. How long he'll last I don't know, as he's only been there a few days. But as he has the use of all his senses, and isn't deaf like Judy's man was, he'll probably throw his hand in fairly soon.

"Well," said Roddy, looking at his watch, "I must be getting along now. I'd no idea it was so late. And now you know all about the White Cottage. Just think it over; if you really think you'd like to take it on, well, come and see me in my office one day. I'm sure we'll be able to come to some arrangement over the rent. But if you take my advice, you'll think it over very carefully—very carefully indeed. And don't say you haven't been warned."

With this final brilliant little piece of sales talk, Roddy arose from his chair, swallowed the last remnants of his last drink, and went out of the Club.

Thinking and pondering over his story, I did likewise.

A few days later I decided to go out to the cottage and look round for myself. I had been somewhat intrigued by Roddy's story, but it had in no way put me off my idea of renting the cottage for a week-end retreat if it was in other ways suitable and if I could get it at a reasonable rent. Furthermore, it was a comparatively unusual experience to be able to check up on one of Roddy's stories on the spot, so to speak. Normally they were given a venue in out-of-the-way parts of the world like New Caledonia or the French Ivory Coast, which made such a course impracticable.

I found the overgrown track easily, and turned down it towards the cottage. Everything was just as he had described it: the overgrown, tunnel-like effect of the rank vegetation; the gaunt

baobab in the tangled clearing; the swamped frangipani under which they had hidden, and the decaying cottage itself.

But there was one great difference. From a shack at the back of the cottage rose a wisp of smoke. The place was no longer deserted. I recollected what Roddy had said about a caretaker and went in search of the man who apparently had not yet grown tired, or afraid, of his responsibility.

I found him lying on his bed inside the hut, taking a possibly well-earned siesta. As Roddy had said, he was undoubtedly a surly type, but after he had got over the immediate effects of his sleep, he expressed his readiness to show me round.

The front door was precisely as Roddy had said it was, swinging on one hinge. We went inside, and the caretaker threw open the shutters. The room was flooded with light—and again, everything was just as it had been described. Bats hung from the roof in multitudes and the room was heavy with their smell. However, the caretaker had obviously been earning his pay; for the droppings had been swept up from the floor, which was comparatively clean, except for the famous bloodstains. There they were, spattered over everything, walls, floor, window-frames, just as I had expected to see them. They were not at all a pleasant sight, and I was glad that I had been warned what to expect. Otherwise, it would have been a very great shock.

Standing at the threshold, unwilling to cross the grisly floor, I indicated them to the caretaker, and said, "What do you think about these? Have there been any of these initiation ceremonies since you have been here?"

For the first time something like a smile crossed his features. "What do you mean, initiation ceremonies?" he said. "Is that what the other Bwana thinks happens here when he told me to keep a look-out? Doesn't he know what makes these marks?"

I said, "Well, if it's nothing to do with initiation ceremonies, then, no, he doesn't." And, sensing that at last someone—to wit, myself—might perhaps be in a position to cap one of Roddy's stories, I went on: "Tell me, then, what does cause them?"

The man led me outside without a word. He pointed to the Indian almond trees. Among their branches I saw several large, indistinct yellowish shapes, which I recognised as fruit-bats. "They do," he said. "When the fruit is ripe, they pull it off the trees and fly into the shade of the house to eat it. The red stains come from the red juices of the skin. Initiation ceremonies . . .," and he put his hand up to his mouth for politeness, and actually laughed. And so did I, when I thought of Roddy's vigil.

JORROCKS IN THE ANTIPODES.

BY J. V. DAVIDSON-HOUSTON.

THE rabbit has done at least one constructive thing in Australia. His excessive fecundity led to the importation of foxes into the State of Victoria in the expectation that these would, in due course, devour the vermin. With that extravagant hospitality which Australia extends to visitors, however, conditions combined to favour the reproduction of foxes to a degree that alarmed the race of farmers, themselves tending to increase rapidly. The answer was the introduction of foxhounds, accompanied by a more lavish use of fire-arms than is customary in the Old Country.

There are, consequently, several packs of hounds in Victoria; two of these hunt foxes, one follows a drag, and another consists of harriers, since some thoughtful colonists once brought hares into this land of marsupials. The last-named pack provides the greatest variety of sport; it is prepared to fight the kangaroo menace, and indeed was once invited to track down a herd of escaped pigs, grown wily and destructive in the Bush.

Through the kindness of an Antipodean friend, I was recently privileged to attend a meet of foxhounds. We forgathered in the street of a small township. Everything from the white weatherboard houses to the horses, hounds, and followers was foreign to this ancient continent; only the blue hills, bristling with their primeval gum forest, looked down with a proprietary air upon the rolling green pastures cleared by the hand of the immigrant.

The Australians have made great efforts to perpetuate the Old Country's traditions of the Chase, so that, at first sight, hounds might have been meeting in some village of the British Isles. There were the Master and Whips in scarlet, the majority of the male followers in rat-catcher, the ladies habited like fashion-plates and decorated with bunches of violets *de rigueur*. There were also the inevitable robust, red-faced and raucous female, and the "cocky farmer" or small-holder who turned out in whatever clothes he happened to be wearing. A large number of children appeared on likely-looking ponies.

The horse has been introduced into Australia primarily for racing; the Army no longer needs him, and there is little money in show-classes. It is, therefore, unusual to see a well-bred hunter of the stamp one would look for in England; nor does turn-out achieve the same standard; for labour in the country districts is so hard to come by and so expensive that

little time is spent on horse or saddlery. To own a hunter is thus an expensive hobby, while to hire one may cost the townsman anything from five to ten pounds a day.

It being a Saturday, which is for a great number of Australians a day of rest, a good many of them were passing in and out of the public-house, in order to waste no time before the bars closed at six. They were all in the mood for conversation, and one sauntered across and looked at my horse.

"Looks as if he could jump, mate," he observed.

"I hope so," I replied, "but it's the first time I've ridden him."

"Are you from the Old Country?" inquired another, my speech doubtless betraying me.

"I'm in the British Army," I explained.

"Good on you, mate. I was in the Royal Artillery in the First War. I came out here in 1921 and never been home. Australia's a great country."

At this moment the hounds arrived. They were towed to the meet in a trailer, the size of which limited the pack to six couple. The all-pervading shortage of labour also hinders hound exercise, and none of them was really fit for a long day. Another trouble is the difficulty of breeding in Australia; for that requires the constant introduction of new blood from England, so that there is a severe shortage of hounds.

The first draw was a small wood of mixed gum trees, never bare though always shedding their dull-green leaves. The hoar-frost had already left the ground, and the air suddenly seemed to have become quite muggy. When I remarked on this to my host he enlightened me.

"It's a fair dinkum Melbourne day," he said; "a night frost and too warm by mid-day. Tomorrow you might play tennis in the morning and have a hail-storm after dinner. Just like you get at home, eh?"

A loud Tally-Ho, echoing as it were from the other side of the world, sent the opossums scurrying into their nests in the tree-forks; and away we went across a fifty-acre pasture, termed locally a "paddock," on the far side of which could be descried an alarming barrier of square-meshed cattle fence. I had all but disgraced myself by shouting "'Ware wire!" when I caught sight of a gap about fifty feet wide, filled by a post-and-rail "panel," on which the field was optimistically converging. The huntsman and a few of the leaders swept over the fence and got clean away, not without the use of expletives imported from the Old Country; but most of us had to bunch together and seize the fleeting opportunity. Sensing that my bay gelding "Uncle" was slowing up as we approached the rails, I drove him at the obstacle and scrambled over it in a disconcerting manner. He hit the top rail with both knees, and almost landed on his face as

I clambered back from his neck in an undignified manner.

Hounds led us through another eucalyptus wood, and as we trotted along the ride I glanced upwards in hopes of seeing an elusive koala browsing on his Manna-gum. The pack was now in full cry across the paddock on the far side, and I urged "Uncle" to take the next rails more seriously. He complied to the extent of hitting them with both hind legs, but recovered himself just in time. Hounds now ran through a wire fence into a field of roots, where they checked. The huntsman cleared the wire neatly, and was about to be followed by one or two others when he called back to hold hard.

"M'Quaide's property!" he shouted. I learned that Mr M'Quaide, owing to some past difference with the Hunt, had warned them off his land, although both fox and hounds were now pursuing their business quite unaware that they were trespassing.

A roughly dressed man, holding a greyhound, was standing at the edge of the roots, watching hounds working, evidently on his way to the local township. Suddenly he slipped the greyhound at something which moved close to him, and a lightning chase ended with the death of the fox on a patch of grass before the farmhouse. Hounds were on the line shortly after, but the pirate had tactfully withdrawn by the time they came up to claim their quarry.

But by this time another factor emerged—the landowner himself, a large beefy-faced man in blue overalls and a greasy felt hat, who glared at us through the fence and showered the huntsman with his most luxuriant verbiage. The latter, employing the Soft Answer unusual in Australia, suggested that the former, as a substantial poultry-farmer, should rejoice over the death of the fox.

"When you're around," retorted Mr M'Quaide, "I keep my chooks locked up. Besides, you woke the baby. Now take your b—— dogs away."

Hounds were duly taken a mile down the road and put into covert. A fox went away, and again I tried "Uncle" at an obstacle. This time he flatly refused to face it, and I soon found myself alone on the near side with a wizened grey-haired individual wearing an overcoat and khaki trousers.

"Don't wait for me, mate," he called out; then, trotting up to the fence, he deliberately climbed off his horse on to the top rail and sat there making clucking noises.

The horse, evidently schooled to this method, did a standing jump and waited obediently for his rider to resume his seat, which he did without ever touching the ground.

Unable to emulate this feat, I cantered disconsolately down the fence till I came to what is euphemistically termed an "Australian gate." This is merely a place where the wires have been cut and the ends attached to a movable post. It

is usually tied to the fixed post by wire loops, and one must dismount both to dismantle and reassemble it.

"They're a bit crook," a Victorian friend admitted.

When I caught up the field, I found my host looking round anxiously for the horse he had lent me.

"Hullo!" he called; "how did you get on?"

"Well," I replied, "I've enjoyed myself very much, though 'Uncle' found some of the fences a bit awkward to jump."

"My word! He's a beaut ride, but he's never jumped in his life! I forgot to tell you."

It was only then that I discovered that quite a lot of non-jumpers followed the hunt, but these, more experienced than I, knew routes and diversions suited to their performance.

It was not a good scenting day, and I was surprised to see hounds suddenly get on to a strong line and stream away over the paddocks. Without a check, they ran through a big wood and swung away from a creek that threatened to throw them out. The unfit horses were soon left behind. I perforce continued my jumping lessons on "Uncle," which involved at each "panel" a contest of wills and a display of acrobatics, so much so that one of the field observed—"he's a bit crook, isn't he?" as he galloped past.

Only when we pulled up at the township where we had met, did I realise that for the last twenty minutes we had been hunting a drag. It was a rule of the Hunt Club that we should finish up where we started; and if the fox would not oblige in this respect, someone was ready with a bag of aniseed to bring us home.

The day was not, however, complete without a celebration in the local hotel. Sandwiches, cakes, tea, beer, and whisky (both Scotch and Australian) stimulated badinage based on the events of the day. Nor were the horses forgotten. In accordance with Australian practice, which applies also to racehorses, they were hosed down with cold water. The sight sent a shiver down the spine of one accustomed to the frosts of an English winter evening and to hot baths for the exercised human body; but "Down under" horses seem to thrive beneath cold showers.

It had been both a curious and a revealing experience. Among the many traditions which the British race has carried to the ends of the earth, hunting has taken root in what was utterly alien soil. Would any other people have brought foxes, horses, pink coats, and fences twelve thousand miles to a land inhabited mainly by gum trees and kangaroos?

And the rabbit started it all.

SKI IN KURDISTAN.

BY D. L. BUSK.

THERE are unfortunately countries in the world where no mountaineering is possible and others where one cannot even hope to ski. At first sight it would seem that Iraq is in this category. Most of it is as flat as Purgatory and in summer as hot as the Inferno. (Whatever Dante may say, my private idea of Purgatory is a limitless plain, which becomes Infernal when the temperature rises.) However, the northern and eastern borders, where Iraq marches with Turkey and Persia, are gratifyingly mountainous, and it was towards this Paradise that my eyes turned when I was appointed to Baghdad.

The disadvantage of these Kurdish ranges is that the snow does not lie very low. Even in mid-winter it is necessary to penetrate far into the depths of the hills to be sure of enough snow for ski-ing, and a prerequisite for a successful holiday was therefore a motorable road, since time would not permit the slow approach by caravan tracks. The only obvious route seemed to be the Rowanduz road, which leads up to the Persian frontier south of Tabriz, and we made a springtime trip to spy out the land.

From Erbil in the plains the road rises to cross barren open ridges until it joins the Rowanduz Gorge, which the Greater Zab, a tributary of the Tigris, has carved through the mountains on its way from its source in the Turkish highlands south of Lake Van. The work of road building was a remarkable achievement in this impressive and tortuous canyon with its sheer walls. In spring every pocket of earth is beautiful with flowers, and we stopped to dig up yellow arum lilies for the garden in Baghdad.

Beyond the gorge the valley widens into the level Diyana Plain, and soon there becomes visible on the right, high up on the stark hillside, the town of Rowanduz with its square modern castle. Rowanduz lies on a side-road, so on our exploratory trip we passed it by and plunged into another narrow valley which took us up slowly to Rayat at about 4500 feet. Here the slopes become more open, and even in April patches of snow lie in sheltered spots. The road wound steadily up to the hamlet of Hajji Umran at 5600 feet, and two miles farther on we reached the Persian frontier.

We could now look back to the north-facing slopes across the valley. They were reasonably gentle, and led up to a horseshoe ridge a couple of miles in circuit. Snow still lay thickly in the sheltered basin, and it seemed clear that we had

found the right place, provided that the road was open thus far in winter and that we could contrive somewhere to sleep.

With so many unknown factors it was obvious that the first ski-ing venture must be more of a reconnaissance in force than a full-dress expedition. I therefore restricted the party to Pat Uniacke of the British Military Mission and to Richard Wilson, our Vice-Consul at Kirkuk.

Accommodation was more difficult. If there is anything I dislike it is roughing it: it seems to me, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, to be unnecessary. I am not like the Himalayan mountaineers who exist on boiled bamboo shoots and the toe-nails of abominable snowmen lightly fried in ghee. Almost as much as roughing it do I dislike luxury hotels; this was just as well, because there were none; in fact, there was no accommodation at all, except what we might beg from villagers, and, in mid-winter, that promised to be bleak and verminous.

Fortunately, it was high time that Pat's chief, the head of the British Military Mission, Major-General Renton, should pay a winter visit of inspection to Iraqi Kurdistan. I was easily persuaded to join him. In an earlier year he had been on tour in southern Iraq. Heavy rain had set in and the whole party made for home before the dirt roads should become impassable quagmires. After some hours' travel the cars bogged down and exiguous shelter was found in a ruined hut. When the lorries arrived with the servants and food, the General demanded dinner. Surrounded by his mud-caked staff, he listened impatiently to the devoted servants struggling in the downpour outside. In half an hour soup appeared, followed by fish. There succeeded meat and an admirable sweet. When coffee was produced, the staff, replete and happy, sat back. "Where," Callum is alleged to have demanded in a voice of thunder, "is the savoury?" That is the sort of man I like to travel with.

I quote this story, not to deride a soldier's proper interest in his victuals, but as a tribute to Callum Renton's powers of organisation and his insistence that there could only be one way of doing things—the right one. His unwavering example inspired not only his own staff but all ranks of the Iraqi army with whom he was working. It is a tribute to his personality that, hard though he had worked them, his departure from Iraq was marked by the sincere regret of all whom he had striven to instruct.

It was a privilege to join his camp at Rowanduz, and at the end of February we met at railhead at Kirkuk for the drive up to the hills. We reached the camp in time for dinner, to which the Iraqi Commander of the Garrison and other officers had been invited.

Next day the three of us drove up the valley in a mood of excited anticipation. Pat and I had not skied for two years

and Richard was eagerly awaiting his baptism of snow.

The winter had been very mild, and there was little snow below Rayat. A few miles beyond, however, the road was blocked by drifts, through which gangs of Kurds were laboriously clearing a way. On the opposite (south) side of the valley lay the slopes I planned to explore, but these were cut off from us by a steep little gorge and were only conveniently accessible from Hajji Umran itself. We therefore contented ourselves with the slopes on the north of the road. Here the snow was patchy, but we were all untrained and needed just such a nursery for practice. We could squeeze in five or six hundred feet of running, and Pat and I unashamedly hired a Kurd to carry our ski uphill, while Richard struggled at lower levels.

The road-clearing gangs watched our antics with remarkably little interest until Wilson did his first fall. A roar of applause then went up and all work stopped in the hope of further entertainment. Pat and I started a no-fall competition, which we held for three days until I succumbed. Pat survived until the last day, when I rejoice to remember that he did three luxurious *sitzmarks* in rapid succession.

That evening we enjoyed an excellent dinner in the Officers' Mess in barracks, followed by a really first-class entertainment in the men's canteen. There were songs and dances and a comic play in which full licence was taken to introduce sly digs at all present. An imitation of General Renton ordering a very fat officer to get off his mule and walk up an exceedingly steep hill to see for himself what was on the other side simply brought the house down—such incidents had been known to occur.

Next day we were joined by Major Ismail Mahmud, Second-in-Command of the Garrison, and for the first time it occurred to us to ascertain what was the Arabic for ski-ing. The word finally selected and later approved by pundits in Baghdad was *Tazahluk*. As it also appears to mean skating, sliding, skidding, tobogganing, slipping and glissading, it is a trifle indefinite. In this, however, it bears a strong resemblance linguistically to my own ski-ing manœuvres, so there can be no complaint as far as I am concerned. Using our spare pair of skis, Ismail Mahmud earned the distinction of being the first Iraqi to ski in his own country.

We could now split into pairs if necessary, and, since the Kurdish gangs had cleared the road as far as Hajji Umran, Pat and I were able to reach the slopes on the south side of the valley. From Hajji Umran there is a 400-foot descent to the bottom (a sore trial to remount on the return journey). Then there opens a magnificent prospect—a wide bowl perhaps a mile across, rising from 5200 feet to a peak in the centre of the containing wall 10,200 feet in height. The floor of the bowl is divided by several subsidiary ridges,

well rounded and 'skiable,' so that an immense variety of runs opened before our delighted eyes.

While we were exploring this new area an advance camp had been moved up to Rayat, and we were thus saved the two-hour run to the snows from Rowanduz. H.R.H. the Emir Abdulillah, the Regent of Iraq, was staying lower down the valley. We telephoned to him to say that the weather looked settled for the morrow, so that he could come up and see for himself that we were really skiing in his country as we had promised.

Next morning the sky was cloudless and we climbed up the central basin until we spotted a caravan of cars winding up the road opposite. We ran down to join H.R.H. for lunch and then perforce had to give an exhibition on a convenient practice slope. This was something of an ordeal in front of an audience consisting of the Regent, three cabinet ministers and about fifty officers, guards, and drivers. Some of the escort had never before seen snow. The Regent asked one of them what he thought it was and he answered "*nimak*" (salt), and was staggered when it proved on cautious contact to be an icy-cold substance that melted mysteriously between his fingers.

On our last day Pat and I decided to try to reach the summit ridge. We chose a rib on the left and climbed fast for some 3600 feet. This brought us to the rim of the basin at about 8800 feet, but the highest peak in the centre was too far off for us to attempt it. The run down was delightful, but exacting. In my experience the curse of Near Eastern ski-ing is wind, which attacks all ridges and often leaves the crests clear of snow while immense drifts are deposited in every gully. No one who is not used to snow of varying texture can really enjoy himself. One must be able to diagnose the surface ahead while running at speed, and be prepared for every kind of variation from iron hard through breakable crust to deep powder. It was 1st March, and for the most part we had spring conditions, hard crust early in the morning, with a slushy surface as the sun increased in strength. But we made the most of a carefully picked line, and when we reached camp had the satisfaction of knowing that the way was now clear for some full-scale ski-ing next year. Our objective had, too, acquired a name. The 10,200-foot culminating summit in the centre of the rim of peaks round the basin rejoiced, we were informed, in the name of Kudu.

In the fall of the year in the backwoods of Canada and the U.S.A. mournful trumpetings are to be heard. Should the passer-by track these noises to their source, he might find a bull moose challenging all comers, but he is more likely to discover a hunter blowing stertorously into a cone of birch bark, or possibly nowadays a plastic horn. The hunter, who may be wearing red clothing

lest he be mistaken for a deer by other sportsmen and shot on the spot, will be endeavouring to reproduce the bellowings of a bull moose on the rampage, in the hope of luring a live one into range. This is moose-calling. In South Africa I never heard of kudu-calling, but perhaps that imposing antelope does not respond to such appeals. Our case was reversed; it was rather Kudu that called us during the torrid months of summer, when, through all the blazing heat and gritty discomfort of dust-storms, it was comforting to remember that Kudu, cool and entrancing, awaited our return.

Not that the summer was wasted in day-dreaming, for there was much to be done. We could not again trespass on the generous hospitality of General Renton, and other accommodation had to be sought. Fortunately in the course of the summer the Iraqi State Railways completed a bungalow rest-house at Hajji Umran, and were also good enough, at my request, to build a footbridge over the stream at the bottom of the valley to replace the tottering tree trunk we had used the winter before. Some tactful negotiation was required before we obtained permission to have the rest-house placed at our disposal in winter, but approval was obtained. We could then set ourselves to procuring stocks of skis, skins and wax, and warning prospective members of the party that they would have to produce their own boots. With the temperature at times exceeding 115° in the shade, all this seemed unreal, but we persevered hopefully and by the cool of the autumn all was ready, though I would not care to say that our clothing and equipment were orthodox. It remained only to choose our dates, mobilise transport, and try to arrange for reliable snow reports. This last is difficult enough even in the Alps, where it is alleged to be not unknown for unscrupulous hotel-keepers to measure the snow in sheltered hollows where it drifts deep, while on the open slopes blades of grass, not to mention stones, are visible. In Kurdistan, where the object of our journey remained incomprehensible to most, we could hardly hope for much accuracy, and we based our instructions to the Police at Rayat on the depth of soft snow a laden donkey could walk through without bogging down. This in practice is at most a foot. Once again the winter was comparatively snowless, and even by the end of February the "donkey gauge" reported free travel everywhere. Knowing, however, that the tracks all ran on the south-facing slopes and that there would be more snow on those with north exposure, we decided to risk it, particularly as our chosen area lay a thousand feet above Rayat.

Transport was still something of a problem. We could muster a Ford station-wagon, a Jaguar saloon and a Triumph two-seater, and, by means known

only to the adept scrounger, Pat Uniacke produced a Hillman 10 h.p. pick-up. It was essential, for it carried our ski and some of the bedding.

The party consisted of 8·01 persons: Nizar and Ellen Jaudat and their 5-months-old son (may he live a hundred years), Joan Fisher and Rosemary Gray, Pat Uniacke and Mike Mays, my wife and myself. The van was driven up a day ahead by the cook, and the rest of us followed with two drivers and the infant's nurse.

We assembled at Kirkuk and once again were blessed by the weather for the drive up to the mountains. Erbil was reached in one and a half hours across the rich uplands, with inspiring views of the distant snow-clad hills. From here another five hours brought us through the police post at Rayat to Hajji Umran, where we arrived for tea. We found that the Iraqi State Railways, perhaps wisely not trusting us overmuch, had sent up a manager to superintend things. Poor man, he had a hard time.

There were four double-rooms at the rest-house and two bathrooms. We sorted ourselves out and found that the accommodation also included a large sitting-room, a dining-room, and an office in which the manager slept. There was a telephone to the outer world. Pat, Mike, and I, obsessed with fear that our masters might become impatient and recall us from leave, viewed it with some alarm, but we were to bless it later.

The interval between dinner and bed was devoted to fitting skis to boots and to waxing. The long and roomy entrance hall, though perishingly cold, was ideal for the purpose. The screw-driver and leather-punch crew worked at one end, and, while the charcoal irons heated at the other, the rich smell of wax and the usual arguments about temperatures and snow conditions made one feel at home. Snow was our great worry that night. We had deliberately come late in the season, as in the previous year, to be sure of finding the road sufficiently snow-free to get up at all. We had hoped for a reasonable layer of spring snow, ideal for beginners and experienced skiers alike, but, alas, the slopes were pitiably bare, and there were moments when I wondered whether I had not led a lot of friends on a wild-goose chase.

While we argued, however, a wind arose from the south. This was first brought to our notice by a belch of smoke from the sitting-room fireplace of such violence and continuity that life in the room became impossible then, and as it turned out, thereafter, so we moved to the dining-room. Scouting expeditions outside reported light snow but a lamentably high temperature. We went to bed as full of pleasant anticipations as if we had just arrived at the Hotel Imperial de Bristol et Quelquechose at St Glühwein sur Piccolo ("Padded sits on all funiculars. Beer for consommation on each summit. Broken

limps freely treated by experienced veterinarians at all ours. Selected family hotel. Poker. Curling. Tango."), but we were much more dirty.

Next day it sleeted. The more charitable called it wet snow to its face and abused it justifiably behind its back. We put in a bit of practice, which was most necessary because we were all grossly out of training and many of us beginners. I admired their pertinacity in trying to ski in such inhospitable conditions. Novices in the Alps, accustomed to smooth practice slopes of even pace, would have been appalled by the variations of snow faced so courageously by our beginners. Their equipment also was far from perfect, and only those who have skied in bad light on poor snow, and with bindings that keep slackening, can appreciate what our dauntless tyros faced. The afternoon and evening were spent in refitting bindings. Locally-made ski boots and ill-fitting prehistoric irons were the devil, but it all kept us warm and cheerful.

Snow fell all night, and continued lightly the next day, with a gale of wind blowing it from all exposed ridges. These, therefore, offered easy walking, and we engaged Kurdish porters to carry our ski straight up the central ridge, leaving on our left the sheltered basin which had provided such fine ski-ing the year before. A climb of 1500 feet in bleak conditions was enough for most of us, though two continued for another half-hour on ski. The descent in the basin fulfilled every expectation and we began to feel that all would be well.

On the third day we were house-bound by a blizzard of an intensity that I have rarely seen equalled. Not much snow was falling, but the wind, which had shifted to the north, drove it violently down on us from the wide uplands of Persia. The flakes streamed horizontally past the windows and formed huge drifts against every exposed object and in every hollow. Expeditions despatched to the outer world reported that two of the cars had disappeared beneath mounds of snow fitting so naturally into the landscape that no one would have suspected their precious kernels. The time for departure was not yet nigh and all radiators had been drained on arrival, so we were not unduly worried. Far more disturbing were conditions inside the rest-house. Built for summer use, it had short-sightedly not been conceived as weatherproof. Only dust is more penetrating than driven snow, and the french windows of the dining-room offered little protection. A drift soon began to form inside. It mounted rapidly. From every joint the snow poured in, and a working party was called to cope with the problem. The manager was not the least uncomfortable member of the party, and I am glad to say that it was he who suggested taking down the Iraqi State Railways' curtains and nailing them tightly

over the entire expanse of french window. Meanwhile, a snow-bank was piled high and tamped down against the windows outside. True, this left us in semi-darkness, but we were now reasonably snow- and draught-proof. The latter was important, because our supply of logs was limited and damp.

This work had hardly been completed when a rain of condensation began to fall from the ceiling of the now warmer room. The remaining curtains had therefore to be slung across the room to catch the drops. Nizar and Ellen Jaudat, architects by profession, were vitriolic in their comments on those responsible for the design and construction of the rest-house.

In the resulting cavern we lived a cheerful if somewhat squalid existence, shadowy by daylight, but warm and cheerful when the lamps were lit, and we settled down to a bout of *vingt-et-un*, which occupied every spare moment until our departure.

After a stormy night the next morning broke cloudless and windless. The contrast was so great that we could scarcely believe our eyes. Breakfast was hurried through and we split into two parties. Leaving the beginners in the basin, my wife, Pat, and I climbed up to the beginning of what we later called the first gully, and thence to a ridge from which we could plot our route further. Here Bridget remained, while Pat and I pushed on across wind-swept snow to the beginning of another gully. The run down was excellent and only the final climb up to the rest-house proved a severe trial.

We hoped that favourable conditions had now set in, but, alas, next day, though sunny, produced a north wind so bitter that we needed all our courage to face it. We found, however, that the gullies were well sheltered, and though the gale howled close over our heads, driving the new snow wildly across the ridges, we could enjoy superb running. We advanced little higher than before, but had the satisfaction of knowing we had devised a route that gave both fine ski-ing and some shelter from the eternal wind. We were now set for a further push and next day faced the blast again clad in everything we possessed. In two and a half hours Pat and I reached the point of entrance to the second gully and left the rucksack with lunch for Bridget and Mike Mays, who were following. We continued up the gully, mistakenly leaving it too soon by a steep side gully on the right. This brought us out on to a plateau at the right foot of what we called the Triangular Peak (from the rest-house it appears a peak, but it is actually only a bastion on the face). Traversing under this to the left we climbed a steep, wide, shallow couloir to the summit (about 9000 feet). From here the route to the top of Kudu, 1200 feet higher, was clear. First a long diagonal to the left across steep slopes to the ridge,

and then up this to the summit, but it was already 2 P.M., and we did not wish to be too long away from the other pair, who were out of sight below. We telemarked down the couloir in the heavy snow and instead of traversing back under the Triangular Peak struck the second gully at its top end and ran down to rejoin the others for lunch in welcome shelter.

Thereafter the descent was all pure joy. We were happy that we had at last worked out a good route to the summit; we knew our way and on the flatter sections had tracks to run in to keep up our speed; we could try once again that *Schuss* on which we had always fallen before—and hold it.

That night we held a *fiesta* to celebrate. The men of the local police post were asked in for tea and cigarettes, the only entertainment our supplies permitted. In return they sang or danced for us, each in the manner of his own folk, Arab, Kurdish, Persian or Turkish.

Next day, unwisely, we made no start. Our excuses were early mist and snow on the peaks and a mild attack of snow-blindness for Pat. We still had another day's leave to come and there was much to occupy us round the rest-house. The cars were dug out, and only when trying to insert the starting-handle into the Triumph did we discover that one of the three engine-mountings had fractured so that the engine had sunk down on one side. My admirable driver Sham'un gazed less hopelessly at the wreck than we did. At his command a working party was told off to bend into suitable shapes some bits of old iron with which my tool-box was permanently cluttered. He had always maintained that they would be useful some day, but tactfully forbore on this occasion to say "I told you so." After heating them in the open fire and final treatment in a glowing charcoal stove, we managed, at the cost of many scorched gloves, to meet Sham'un's specifications, and he retreated happily with the angle irons, yards of wire, and a couple of jacks to heave the engine into place. Hours later he emerged from under the car grimy but happy and showed us with pride the result of his labours. The makeshift repair did not look imposing, but it held until we reached Baghdad.

Another tower of strength in those days was Nizar's servant 'Abbas, who was unfailing. Poor man, he was always being summoned to help, and it was rare for ten minutes to pass without the cry "*Wein* 'Abbas?" "Where is 'Abbas?" from someone in distress. The "where" became added permanently to his name and as "Weinabbas" he will be affectionately remembered by us all.

Meanwhile it had been discovered that the clutch of the Hillman was slipping beyond repair, so that it would have to be towed down to the workshop at Rowanduz. The other two cars were in fine shape, but they could only be started with much swing-

ing by hand after the radiators were filled with hot water. That night we sacrificed some of our few hurricane-lanterns, which burned under the bonnets to keep off the chill.

After a day of the hardest labour it was clear that we must break out downwards soon. If the weather were fair on the morrow we could have one more try for Kudu, but our stocks of food, wood, and paraffin were running perilously low.

Alas! next day the gale continued with constant snow-flurries. Ski-ing was out of the question. We were particularly disappointed, because the Regent of Iraq had been waiting patiently at Shaqlawa rest-house above Erbil for a call to join us. At first we had said there was not enough snow to make it worth while. Then we reported that the weather was foul. Now there was no doubt that even if he reached us he would not escape.

We decided, therefore, that the two "fit" cars should try to make a trail down for the lame ducks, and we telephoned to the Iraq Petroleum Company at Kirkuk, who generously promised to send up a four-wheel-drive lorry to tow out the Hillman.

We loaded the two cars, but though we had thirty Kurds to help push and dig we only made one of the six miles to Rayat before we were brought to a halt by impassable drifts in cuttings in the road. Two hours were required to get even thus far and as much for the return.

Our position was now becoming precarious, and rumours arose that we should soon be compelled to eat the dog that had attached itself to our kitchen in the hope of scraps. Our last meagre and unattractive meals certainly looked and tasted as if dog were a major ingredient. I was reminded of the Victorian tag:—

"In the flavour of these pies
It is not hard to recognise
The remains of our old dog Tray,"

but I can confirm that the animal was alive on our departure.

It was clear that help was required from below, and I telephoned to the *Mutasarrif* (Provincial Governor) of Erbil. My friend Sheikh Hasan Talabani did not let us down; when we explained that food and firewood were running very short and our leave had expired, he promised that a hundred villagers should assemble next day at Rayat. Sure enough they did, and with them came the relief lorry, which, however, failed to force its way farther up that evening.

Next day, while some cleared the approaches and kept the cars running, others strove within the rest-house to fight the drifting snow and maintain a reasonable standard of life. This was not easy. The sanitation and water supply were packing up under the unaccustomed strain, and we had some unattractive plumbing and engineering problems. Fires in bedrooms had had to be given up because of shortage of fuel, and

we congregated round the one smoky blaze in the dining-room. The sitting-room, which we had long abandoned, was an amazing spectacle. Snow had drifted two or three feet deep inside the ill-fitting windows, and the fine white powder swirled unceasingly across the floor, and under the impulse of the more furious gusts drove up on to table-tops and chairs. It was about the most desolate room I have ever seen. In the bedrooms Nizar recorded ten degrees of frost, and we woke to see driven snow-dust whistling through the leaky windows. To emerge from bed required considerable courage, and few of us undressed much during those last few days. I know that when I ultimately reached Kirkuk I found I still had my pyjamas on, sandwiched between layers of other clothing.

Potentially the coldest night I have ever spent was on a col in the Canadian Rockies, where I woke to find two inches of snow on my sleeping-bag. In fact, however, I was warm and comfortable, because having slept through the storm I did not brush the snow off. My wakeful companions had done so and shivered in consequence of their ignorance of one of the first principles of Arctic exploration. At Hajji Umran the snow was more of a coverlet than a blanket, and I do not think I have ever *felt* so cold, though I have known far lower temperatures.

Meanwhile the gangs laboured up to us from Rayat to meet the villagers who were working down. At 4 P.M. the lorry broke through triumphantly to the rest-house. Late though it was, we decided to leave; for snow was still falling, and the gale would blow it during the night into all the laboriously dug cuttings. The lorry-driver, having had one experience of the road, jibbed at towing the disabled Hillman, so we decided to abandon it for the moment. The lorry did, however, transport back to civilisation the rest-house manager, whom no trials had apparently dismayed. I must say, though, that I should have liked to hear what he said privately to his wife on his return; he can rarely have lived in such a madhouse.

The descent deserved a minor epic; in the half-light of dusk, amid racing snow-flurries driven by the unrelenting wind, the first car stuck time and again and had to be pushed out by the throng of Kurds, who, brandishing their shovels and shouting fierce war-cries, seemed to look on the whole affair as a supreme joke. Some of them still worked at the eternal shovelling, but others attached themselves in groups to each car. After a mile or so the road descends in zigzags, and once each band had seen its own car in motion the men would plunge yelling straight downhill to meet and succour it, if necessary, on the next leg of the road. They were directed by a Headman on a gallant horse, which treated the steep hillsides and treacherous snow as if they were Epsom

Downs. With each stoppage a dozen cheery visages, wrapped to the eyes against the cold in their tasselled silk scarves, would be thrust into the windows of the car and would be exhorted not to lose heart. A few heaves, during which I feared that every external fitting would be wrenched off the car, and the chained wheels would bite again. Their enthusiastic labours were all the more remarkable because our activities in their country, indeed our very presence at such an inhospitable time of year, had appeared incomprehensible to them. They were completely uninterested in our ski-ing ventures, even when suitably rewarded for acting as porters—a folk remarkable for their independence, for which they are still prepared to fight, since formidable daggers are worn in every cartridge belt. Even when engaged in such work, one or two of them preferred to have their rifles with them.

The cars that followed had an easier passage, but even so it took us one and a half hours to cover the six miles to Rayat. From there the road was comparatively snow-free. The Jaudats, whose infant had remained unruffled throughout, were despatched at once to the hospitality of Sheikh Hasan at Erbil. Pat and Mike were worried by the home-made repair of the engine-mounting on the Triumph and decided to take things slowly. With thoughts of hot baths and meals, I drove my carload straight through the 180 miles to Kirkuk. From Erbil on we were dogged by another car. When we pulled up at the Consulate at 2 A.M. we found it was a light police-truck mounting a Lewis-gun, which had been sent by the solicitous Sheikh Hasan to convoy us, a final and typical touch of his generous hospitality to us happy-go-lucky visitors to his Province.

Next evening we were all safely reunited in Baghdad, with the exception of the undaunted cook, who stayed with the broken-down Hillman and our ski, awaiting rescue. His cheerful telephone messages were relayed to us during the next few days. Still it blew and still it snowed. There was no hope of a lorry getting up for weeks. The Hillman had disappeared in the snow and could not be found. He had not yet had to burn the ski to keep warm. At this awful threat he was ordered home. According to his own account it took him nine hours on foot to cover the six miles to Rayat. He was a mendacious creature, but this time I could almost believe him. Weeks passed before the Hillman could be salvaged.

In winters to come others will follow the route we led to the snows of Kurdistan; they will find conditions easier and will no doubt be more efficient, but they can hardly enjoy themselves more than the first haphazard parties.

THE PEERLESS *TRANSIT*.

BY R. B. CHENEVIX TRENCH.

Two World Wars have so speeded the flow of scientific wonders that we are losing our capacity to marvel at them. In the slow-moving atmosphere of a hundred and fifty years ago the luckless inventor faced a barrier of prejudice and ignorance which it was often impossible to break down. Lack of influence, vested interests, poverty or indifference often succeeded in preventing good ideas from reaching fruition. This is the story of a ship—or rather "vessel," to be more correct—which ought to have revolutionised the trading, and hence the history, of an island race of shopkeepers. If only her design had caught on, if only promises had not been broken, if men would only believe the evidence of their eyes . . . but the "ifs" are endless with possibilities. Here, then, is her history.

It was on the 10th May 1800 that a vessel was launched at Itchenor in Sussex which, from truck to keel, was to be different from anything ever seen before. Her designer was Richard Gower, an officer in the service of the lordly East India Company and an independent thinker many decades ahead of his time.

Gower's critical eye saw so many things wrong with the ships of his day that he came to wonder how any of them reached their destinations unless pushed along by a following wind, like a hat blown willy-nilly down a road. Their broad, round-bottomed hulls slithered sideways when the wind was anywhere ahead of the beam. Their bluff bows, weighed down by guns and ponderous spars, neither cut through nor lifted over a heavy head sea. The sea just stopped them dead. The enormous weight of their masts and spars made them roll abominably and strained their hulls until they leaked like sieves.

Their rigging, too, particularly annoyed Gower. It was incredibly heavy and far too complicated. In bad weather its wind resistance alone was nearly enough to nullify the driving power of the sails. It took endless labour to keep in repair, and, in order to support the massive masts, it had to be set up so taut that it opened the seams of the hull into incurable leaks. Then look at their sails! Half of them were blanketed by their neighbours and disturbed by back winds and eddies from them. Again, look how unmanageable a large square-sail became in a gale. Forty men on a large man-of-war's mainyard were sometimes not enough to save the sail in a real blow.

No; windward ability was the thing to aim for and Gower

started with the hull of his vessel. He gave it an almost square bilge, tapering in a concave V to the keel. He reduced its beam and fined out its lines. To give a good spread to the rigging and to keep the deck dry in a seaway he made the sides flare outwards instead of tumbling inwards in the fashion of the day.

All this was revolutionary enough, but it was her rig that really made his fellow-seamen stare and caused one of them to nickname her "Sticks," a jibe which was later to be cast in his teeth. Into a hull barely a hundred feet long Gower put no fewer than five slender masts. The foremost one he rigged with square-sails and the remainder with fore-and-aft sails suspended from horizontal gaffs. Such a rig became normal many years later, but its name was not yet coined and no one knew what to call it. But in yet another respect Gower anticipated events. For even when he later reduced the number of masts to four, the after sails had the proportions of those of extreme modern racing yachts. In this he was a century and a quarter ahead of his time!

Such were the main features of this unique vessel, which was christened the *Transit*. Seventeen of Gower's friends had faith enough in his brains to subscribe £8000 towards her building, fitting out, and insurance. The absence of subtle curves in her timbers enabled great economy to be effected in her building, for at least half of it was done by ordinary house carpenters. Shipwrights were employed only on the more specialised work of planking and finishing off. There was an elegant and optimistic crowd present at her launching.

A few weeks later she was rigged and ready for sea. Gower took command and steered eastwards, embarking a pilot in the Downs to take him to Gravesend, and another for the passage up-river to Blackwall. Both these connoisseurs in the handling of ships were loud in their praises of the *Transit*'s qualities. The latter, according to Gower, "turned the vessel up the river to Blackwall with a degree of pleasure bordering on ecstasy." It was a beat to windward and she had proved both fast and weatherly in smooth water. This was a good start.

Now the *Transit* had been designed for the Packet Service—the fast carrying of light cargoes such as mails and passengers—and it was while she was being so fitted out that her first chance of publicity came. The first stone of the West India dock was about to be laid and the ceremony was to be attended by Earl Spencer, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and by Pitt in person. The occasion could not have been more auspicious. The *Transit* was close at hand and the attention of the two great men was drawn to her. Yes, they were interested. The First Lord wished to see her perform under sail.

Gower hurried on the work of fitting out until, on the 8th

August, it was finished and he was able to exercise his new crew. Next day he received on board the First Lord and a Captain Rose of the Navy. But now came the first setback. The wind fell to a flat calm, which completely ruled out any demonstration of her manœuvring powers. However, all was not lost. Spencer inspected every detail of the *Transit* and asked innumerable questions about her. After hearing the rhapsodies of the river pilot, he appeared thoroughly impressed and gave Gower such strong hopes of support that he went ashore bubbling with optimism to break the news to his fellow-shareholders. The managing owner promptly treated them all to a dinner of celebration.

Two days later things began to look queer. Gower spent the 11th and 12th August in a vain attempt to gain an audience with the First Lord, only to be told in the end that the Admiralty was no longer interested. Naval officers, he was informed, had convinced His Lordship that the *Transit* was no improvement on existing vessels! It was a bitter blow; for the company's funds would stand no more experimenting, and the *Transit* must start earning her keep. Much against his will, Gower had to accept a cargo for Lisbon and the crippling restriction of sailing in convoy, since the country was at war. However, soon after leaving London, the *Transit* met a real snorter in the Channel and was forced to turn back. But the time was not wasted; for the bad weather showed up a number of weaknesses in her new-fangled rig which were corrected during the winter. Gower got rid of one mast, re-spaced the remainder, and made a number of other alterations.

In the spring of 1801 Gower made a last attempt to have the *Transit* employed in her intended rôle, and applied both to the Post Office and the East India Company. But they turned him down, and he had once more to seek a cargo. He was taken up by the Portuguese Government's agent, who loaded the unfortunate vessel with shot and saltpetre, and with the baggage and retinue of the ambassador. While waiting at Spithead for the convoy to assemble, Gower worked-up his crew until they were efficient, but, since the *Transit* was loaded below her designed sailing draught, he was unwilling to try her paces against any really fast ship.

Fate forced his hand. On 29th July he heard that the King was about to embark in one of two royal yachts lying off Lymington, with the frigate *Hydra* in company. How could he miss such an opportunity! If the King himself were to notice the *Transit's* phenomenal speed and handiness, not even the First Lord could say him nay. He quickly shifted berth down to Lymington.

Next day the King embarked, and two days later the yachts and the frigate got under way

to make the short passage to Christchurch, where the rest of the Royal Family were to embark. Gower joined company, but, in order to give the *Transit* as stiff a test against the frigate as possible, he made a detour to the southward. Then, when well to leeward, he turned to windward and steered to close the *Hydra*. Hand over fist the *Transit* overhauled her rival and sailed clean through her lee, notwithstanding the blanketing by the bigger ship's sails. Gower was delighted. If the *Transit* could beat a frigate when she was loaded, what might she not achieve at her designed draught!

This feat had not gone unnoticed. Two gentlemen, who had watched the royal party's arrival from the top of Christchurch tower, were so impressed that they boarded the new wonder as soon as her anchor was on the bottom. They strongly advised Gower to call at the house where the King was to breakfast next morning before continuing his journey to Weymouth. Buoyed up again with hope, Gower took their advice and succeeded in getting an introduction to Sir Harry Neale, who commanded the King's yacht and was therefore much in His Majesty's company.

On the 3rd July the King arrived at the house, which was near the shore. A moderate off-shore wind was blowing, ideal for showing off the *Transit's* manœuvrability in front of the house, and Gower took full advantage of it. When the royal squadron was under way he did even better. He sailed three times round the yacht, close enough to see that the whole royal party was watching enthralled. Then, when the yachts set course for Weymouth, and there was no sign that he was arousing any but an academic interest, he parted company and went back to Spithead, once more disappointed.

After such discouragements he was surprised soon afterwards to receive a summons to London by the Chairman of the Honourable East India Company. He was graciously received by his former employer, who was doubtless familiar at least with his name; for the Company had previously awarded him fifty pounds for the invention of a patent log for measuring the speed of ships. (Gower had, in fact, anticipated by about fifty years a form of patent log still in use today.)

The great man not only promised to befriend him but went so far as to guarantee to buy the *Transit*, provided she could match her speed in a fair test against the fastest man-of-war available. Gower jumped at the offer, but pointed out that the *Transit*, loaded as she was, could not possibly show up at her best. The Chairman hastened to assure him that allowance would be made for that, adding as an afterthought that all risks attending the trial would have to be borne by Gower. Captain Corner would embark as the Company's representative for the trial and would

report on her performance. In order to lose no time Gower and Corner were sent back to Portsmouth at the Company's expense in a specially hired post-chaise-and-four, Gower whiling away the journey with rosy visions of his old company's generosity. Success was at last in sight.

On arrival at Portsmouth, Gower was relieved to hear from the Port Admiral that his opponent had not yet been chosen. Good, he thought. In the meantime there would be a chance to lighten the *Transit* to a better sailing draught, which would be worth all the promises in the world of "allowance being made." While the negotiations with the Customs were under way, his opponent's name was announced. She was to be H.M.S. *Osprey*, an eighteen-gun sloop-of-war, considered faster than any frigate in the port. Gower landed his surplus cargo and spent the following week exercising his crew. On 23rd July the *Osprey* was ready and sent over a copy of the signals and instructions to be used in the trial, which was to take place on the following day. The *Transit's* small company turned in that night with the liveliest expectations of success on the morrow.

The day of the trial dawned fine with a pleasant easterly breeze. By 4 A.M. the *Transit* was under way, making over towards the *Royal William*, the Port Admiral's flagship, which sent a boat alongside and put on board six seamen to reinforce the *Transit's* handful. At 5 A.M. the *Osprey* made sail, and both vessels tacked to the eastward to clear the Isle of Wight. By 5.30 there was sea-room ahead and they made all sail to the south-east, still steering to windward. By seven o'clock the *Osprey* was two miles astern. By eight the *Transit* had gained another mile, when she was ordered by signal to close. Gower boarded the sloop with Corner. On deck they were met by Captain Irwin, her commanding officer, who asked Gower to keep close to him as the weather was coming on thick. The *Transit's* superiority, he said, would be shown by the small amount of sail she would need, and this he would mention in his report.

Cheered by this admission of defeat, Gower returned on board and carried out his instructions, and the *Transit*, with half her sails furled, easily kept up with the sloop. All this was very gratifying, but what the *Osprey* needed was a lesson which could not possibly be mistaken. At noon, when she was three hundred yards ahead of him, Gower decided to act. He made all sail, passed her to windward, crossed her bow, and was back in station astern in twenty-five minutes. An hour later he varied the performance by sailing through the sloop's lee, luffing across her bow, and dropping back astern again in twenty minutes. For windward work in smooth water the *Transit* had triumphantly vindicated her designer.

The weather was now clearing and the sloop made a determined bid to shake off her opponent. She suddenly hoisted a signal and turned dead down wind, on the point of sailing which ought to have given her the greatest advantage over her adversary's small sails. At the same instant, with a speed possible only to a man-of-war's huge crew, studding-sails blossomed on both sides, doubling the spread of her yards. The *Transit* squared her yards and kept pace without setting a single extra sail. Irwin tried all the tricks he knew. Gower could see his men shifting her guns in a desperate effort to find a better sailing trim. Still the ridiculously under-canvassed freak held on to her skirts. As a last resort Irwin altered course to bring the wind on the quarter. The sloop's lee studding-sails were seen to crumple and disappear while the weather ones remained set on the re-trimmed yards. Still without a single studding-sail set, the *Transit* forged ahead and passed her, having now beaten her on all points of sailing in light winds. The two vessels then shortened sail and jogged along in company through the night.

Next morning dawned with a strong wind from the east and a rising sea. At six o'clock the two rivals made all the sail they could prudently carry and turned close-hauled to the north-east. The *Transit* began edging to windward of the sloop and had to alter course down wind constantly to keep in station. At nine o'clock Gower and Corner agreed that this was no way to demonstrate her windward ability in strong winds, so they decided to abandon station-keeping and just sail as close to the wind as she would go. There was now a high head sea and the *Osprey* was making heavy weather of it, pitching deeply and throwing sheets of spray as high as her lower yards. The *Transit*, dry and comfortable, crept steadily up on her weather side and passed her.

By noon the *Osprey* was three miles astern and to leeward, and an hour later the distance had opened to four miles. At five o'clock in the afternoon, when the sloop was hull-down eight miles away, Gower again closed in response to a signal. He hailed Irwin and asked him if he were now satisfied with the *Transit's* superiority and whether he intended to return to Spithead. Irwin replied that he was perfectly satisfied but that his ship would not be able to make Spithead that night. But if Gower thought the *Transit* could, good luck to him. Gower closed the land under a press of sail and in just over two hours the *Osprey* was out of sight. By half-past nine the *Transit* was snugly anchored at Spithead.

Next morning the *Royal William's* seamen left the *Transit* and gave her three ringing cheers on leaving. They had taken part in a feat which had stirred every fibre of their professional admiration. No sooner were they gone than naval officers swarmed on board with their

congratulations. It was not until one o'clock in the afternoon that the *Osprey* came to her anchor, when Gower went on board to return the borrowed signal-books and instructions. Irwin and his four officers showered him with praise and wished him all the reward his success deserved. They were particularly impressed by the *Transit's* behaviour in heavy weather. In the slog to windward every man forward of the sloop's mainmast had been soaked to the skin, and they had been amazed to see men sitting on the *Transit's* forecastle as dry as a bone. The last straw was the news that she had anchored the night before!

Irwin and Corner sent in their reports next day. The *Transit's* shareholders were again up in the clouds. They dined Gower ashore and all their talk was of how they could adequately reward him. Four days later Gower was up in London knocking at the door of the august Chairman of the Honourable East India Company. But the door stayed shut. With a sinking heart the inventor walked the passages all day. Gower never saw the perjured dignitary again, nor did he ever learn the reason for this sudden breach of faith. Sickened with frustration, he went back to Portsmouth to make the *Transit* earn her living once more. He re-shipped the landed cargo and on the 29th August sailed with the convoy. The escort was provided by the *Triumph*, of seventy-four guns, his first victim the *Hydra*, the *Solebay* (another frigate), and the naval schooner *Netley*. On 3rd September the whole fleet anchored in Torbay, held up by a strong north-westerly wind which kept them there for a week.

At daylight on the 10th September the wind had gone round to the south-east and the fleet began to get under way. By eight o'clock all but six had made sail, but Gower made no move except to go ashore. He climbed the heights above Brixham and joined the crowd of spectators enjoying the spectacle of eighty sail in company beating clear of the land before turning down-Channel. Seeing a signal flying in the men-of-war, he borrowed a telescope from a bystander to read it. The stranger, who revealed that he was the underwriter's agent, passed pungent comments on the laggards who had started late, especially the four-masted monstrosity, which could not now possibly catch up with the convoy. He would report her to Lloyd's at the first opportunity. Gower enjoyed the joke and then disclosed himself. He told the agent that, if he reported truthfully what he saw, the insurers and owners would have no cause to complain. The puzzled agent agreed to do this and Gower bade him farewell.

It was not until 10.30 that the *Transit* was under way. Soon afterwards Gower spotted the ship of the fellow-shipmaster who had been rash enough to nickname his beloved vessel "Sticks." This worthy had

been beating backwards and forwards since six in the morning. On her second tack the *Transit* caught her, and, as he passed to windward, Gower hailed, "On board the 'Labour-in-vain,' ahoy! Here comes 'Sticks'!" This heavy sally was greeted with black looks and mutterings about going to the devil. By noon the *Transit* had weathered the whole fleet and was clear of Berry Head. Gower hove-to and hoisted the colours for the agent on the cliff to see, and the latter faithfully carried out his promise. It took two days for the whole convoy to clear the land and make down-Channel again.

The rest of the passage to Lisbon was uneventful. Gower fought boredom by sailing up and down the length of the convoy and by dropping astern to try out the set of his studding-sails when the wind was fair. While he was doing this the *Hydra* closed and made a determined effort to avenge her defeat off Lymington. But, with only half her studding-sails set, the *Transit* held the frigate, although, as Gower said, "She crowded more sail than I had ever witnessed." On the 18th September a hard wind was blowing from the north and every ship except the *Transit* was rolling abominably in the high following sea. Most of them had lowered their upper yards on deck to ease their motion, and all marvelled at the *Transit's* steadiness.

When it was time for the Lisbon ships to part company, Captain Paget of the *Hydra* signalled the *Transit* to come within hail and gave her his authority to act as general sheep-dog to keep the convoy closed up. In one hour the *Transit* had closed and hailed every one of the eighteen ships remaining in company. On the 24th September a boat came over from the *Hydra* and her First Lieutenant climbed on board with instructions to take him on ahead into Lisbon. The boat's crew followed him up the side and the boat was taken in tow. Now it so happened that the coxswain of the boat had been the stroke oar of the King's barge at Weymouth three months before, and had overheard all the conversation of the royal passengers in the stern-sheets. He told William Liston, Gower's chief officer, that the King had been full of admiration for the *Transit's* handiness and had asked many questions about her. Alas! there had been no one present who could give him the answers.

While the vessel was at Lisbon peace returned once more and Gower was at last free to make independent voyages without being hobbled by sailing in convoy. Even though she had been denied this freedom before, the *Transit's* reputation became known ashore and the print-shops of Lisbon were soon full of her likeness.

On the 9th November the Post Office packet *Duke of York* sailed for home with a fine easterly wind to help her on her way. Four days later the *Transit*

followed her, but by this time the wind had gone round to the north-east and was blowing strongly and raising an ugly sea. The *Transit*, with her small sail area and easily driven hull, rode the seas like a gull, never heeling more than twelve degrees. On the 22nd November, still with a foul wind, she passed the *Duke of York*, and next day the lead told Gower that he had crossed the hundred-fathom line. On the 25th November he bore up to the eastward with a fair wind for the first time. The *Transit* now fairly flew up-Channel. Next day the Isle of Wight was sighted, and, although forced by a hard gale to anchor off Deal for eighteen hours, she arrived in the Thames on the 28th November, easily the first ship home.

Gower's connection with the child of his invention now came to an end. The *Transit* was sold. What his feelings were we can only guess. Tricked and disillusioned as he was, perhaps he was glad to make a deal. But the firm that bought her did so on condition that she should prove capable of making two voyages a year to the Levant instead of the usual one by normal ships, so it is to be hoped that they paid a good price for such an advantage. A Captain Muirhead was given command, and Liston, wise in her ways, remained as chief officer. In July 1802 she made a fast and uneventful passage to Constantinople, surprising the Turks by beating through the Dardanelles against a foul wind and current. Unlike the British, the Turkish authorities at once sent a master shipwright to measure her in order to build a copy. She arrived home in December, having beaten all her rivals by at least a month.

One of the secrets of the *Transit's* dryness in a heavy sea had been Gower's insistence on keeping her ends light by reserving them for the living quarters. Her new owners, however, did what so many have done—reduced her sailing powers in the interests of greater carrying capacity. They knocked away bulkheads, filled the living spaces with cargo, and built an ungainly poop to house both officers and men. This poop was so high that several feet had to be cut off the after sails. It also meant that she would be loaded still deeper below her best sailing draught. But even these shackles could not slow her down enough for her to be seriously challenged by any other ship she ever fell in with. She settled down to a regular beating of the existing record to and from the Levant.

By the time she was ready to begin her fourth voyage in 1804, war had once more broken out and her owners refitted, armed, and manned her as a fighting ship. From the first her bulwarks had been pierced for nine guns each side. They were now taken on board to the further detriment of her sailing trim. However, she was at least independent of sailing in convoy, and furthermore Liston was promoted to command her. In April 1805 she sailed on

her fourth voyage to the Mediterranean.

It was another fast trip, distinguished by a single event which every soul on board must have remembered to his dying day. On the outward voyage the *Transit* was in the latitude of Cadiz on a dark night. At midnight, when all hands were on deck at the changing of the watch, the moon rose and brought a shout from the look-out. It needed no night-glass to make out a frigate close to windward, sailing away on the opposite tack: Liston hailed, and was answered in French. As the moonlight grew brighter a splendid and awesome sight was revealed. The little *Transit* was in the centre of the combined fleets of France and Spain which Nelson was to destroy six months later. The frigate immediately wore round, passed astern of the *Transit*, and, coming up under her lee, fired four shots. Liston at once turned to windward and made all sail; the frigate followed suit. But it was to windward that the *Transit* excelled and she soon began to draw away. The enemy, realising that her only hope was to wing the quarry, turned her broadside to bear and loosed off twelve more rounds, none of which found their mark. No other ship of that great fleet seems to have taken any notice and the *Transit* sailed out of sight unscathed.

Next year Liston was to show quite unmistakably that her wonderful sailing powers had been little affected by the unwelcome alterations to her. Early in the year her owners learned that three rivals were about to sail for Smyrna with goods particularly in demand there. The *Transit* was far from being ready for sea, but the owners decided to accept the challenge. The three interlopers all sailed from London on the 27th March: Liston did not get away until over three weeks later. Her rivals were probably not aware that they were being pursued, but the sequel was still quite fantastic. By the time Liston was through the Straits of Gibraltar he had passed all three of his competitors. They reached Smyrna *six weeks* after the *Transit*, whose cargo had already been sold.

She was now empty and in ideal sailing trim. Liston, who had long since inherited the mantle of Gower's enthusiasm, saw his chance to lay on a spectacular demonstration. Five miles above Constantinople, on the shore of the Bosphorus, stood one of the Sultan's palaces. The Turkish man-of-war anchorage was close by. When the wind and current were both from the north, the Sultan liked to amuse himself by watching his seamen manning the two most weatherly ships and beating back and forth across the strait, just holding their own. On the 22nd August two ships—a frigate and a brig—were engaged in this activity when it came on to blow and the frigate had to anchor with all sail set to avoid being swept down into the Marmora.

She brought up half a mile to windward of the *Transit*, which was shortening-in her cable for getting under way. At that moment Liston was giving a dinner-party to some English merchants. He explained to his guests why the frigate had anchored and then added expansively, "Now, gentlemen, I will exhibit the superiority of this vessel over the frigate under similar circumstances, when adroitly manœuvred by British seamen!"

As he finished speaking, the anchor came off the ground and the *Transit* began to move ahead. She weathered the anchored frigate on her second tack, then worked her way up abreast the palace, where she hove-to and fired an eleven-gun salute. Every window of the palace was crowded with spectators, who were seen to include "a selection of the most lovely young females that the eye of man ever beheld: doomed, alas! to loiter away life in voluptuous inutility." (The comment is Gower's, who was not present at the time. It is not recorded whether the *Transit's* seamen agreed with it.)

Meanwhile the brig had just managed to hold her own by keeping in the eddy current inshore. But the Turkish admiral ordered her out for a straight trial with the *Transit*, so she made for the centre of the strait, where the latter had lost ground while hove-to, and placed herself on Liston's weather quarter. It was very soon all over. On her first tack the *Transit* was half a mile to windward of her. The brig gave up and ran for the eddy current again. Liston rubbed in his victory by beating against the full stream of the current two miles above the palace before turning round and landing his guests and starting for Smyrna. As he was making sail, a boat came hurrying after the *Transit*, but in the preoccupation of the moment no one on board noticed her and she was left astern. On arrival at Smyrna, Liston heard to his annoyance that the boat had contained "a handsome purse of coin" from the Sultan in admiration of the *Transit's* performance!

The strange "four-masted vessel"—no one knew what else to call her—inevitably built up a reputation among the merchants. Gower himself once had the pleasure of overhearing a complete stranger in the City refer to her as "the Smyrna mail-coach." The additional burden of heavy cargoes, guns, and a clumsy superstructure sometimes combined to sink her as much as two feet below her designed draught, and that is a lot for a little vessel of only two hundred tons. Yet she was never outsailed by any ship she ever met. She had more than one brush with Spanish gunboats in the Straits of Gibraltar, but never had any trouble in out-distancing them. She always delivered her cargoes dry and in first-class condition, and was thus a favourite from the shippers' point of view.

She was no less a paragon to

the seaman. The wear and tear on her rigging was so small that seven years after her launching she was still using all her original spars and ropes, although much of the latter was made from an old Spanish cable laid-up again. In February 1807 she was in a Channel gale which sank and dismasted many ships. She had to run for shelter, but arrived "without having overstrained a rope-yarn," let alone having lost any spars. So much for the prophecies of those who had foretold that her masts would prove too slender. She held about a quarter less tonnage than a conventional ship of her length, but her ability to make two voyages to their one more than compensated for this. She was steadier, drier, and more manœuvrable than any other vessel of her size, yet carried a smaller crew. Could any one vessel have advanced the development of the sailing-ship more?

Yet no one in England copied her. The Turks tried, but they also tried to improve on Gower's ideas. They were a little too clever and their model could not stand up to her sail. The reason for the English merchants' lack of interest was that the country was hardly ever at peace during the *Transit's* life, so they would have been faced with the choice of sailing in convoy, when speed was no advantage, or of manning and arming her as a man-of-war, which could swallow up all the profits of a voyage. However, the firm that took this risk seems to have found it well worth while. Perhaps it needed Gower or Liston, whose hearts were in the venture, to make it a success. The Admiralty's lack of interest is easier to understand though not to excuse. The First Lord was he who had turned a deaf ear to the rumblings from the Fleet, which erupted into mutiny at Spithead four years earlier.

The *Transit's* life was short and she was soon forgotten. In 1810, after Liston had left her, she was lost on a reef south-west of Haiti while on another voyage to the port of Smyrna, which knew her so well.

Thirty years later another revolutionary ship met equal opposition—the fifty-gun frigate *Vernon*, the finest and fastest of her day. To anyone who ever served in her there was no question about her superiority, yet the armchair critics persistently slandered her. Her designer had at least some advantage in being a naval officer: Gower was not so lucky. The maritime world of his day was just not ready for him and he suffered the same fate as many another inventor. Most of his ideas were one by one adopted in the course of years; but, coming all together as they did, they made a change too radical to be accepted by the most obstinately conservative profession of the day.

ODD FISH.

BY OLIVER CASSELS.

"The richness of the meats alone will not persuade philosophy to grace your board."

—ATTRIBUTED TO THE SON OF HU F'LUNG F'LI'S PATERNAL UNCLE.

"WHAT! At it again?" The Senior Angler halted in the doorway of the inn parlour and, with an exaggerated air of astonishment, regarded the three men sitting round the corner table. "Surely you're not still talking flies?"

"Why not?" answered the youngest of the trio, looking up from the open fly-book on the table before him. "What else would one talk about in a fishing-pub before supper?"

The Senior Angler let the door swing-to behind him and passed a heavily laden fishing-bag through the bar hatchway in exchange for a tankard.

"Your outlook is too limited," he went on with a disarming smile as he crossed the room to settle himself in a deep arm-chair. "If the time and energy you spend on that subject were devoted to improving your rod-work, your wives would have happier and more contented husbands."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the other. "What makes you think we're unhappy?"

"Can there be any other explanation for this everlasting discussion of flies?" replied the Senior Angler, taking a pull at his ale. "These post-mortems prove you're dissatisfied—frustrated, I might almost say. They're inspired by the might-have-been; by the trout you've failed to catch. But I see you don't agree. Tell me, then, how did you get on today?"

"Oh! Not much doing," answered the younger man, caught off his guard. "But I must tell you about one good fish I saw this morning. He rose under the far end of that second weir. He must be a beauty, but I could do nothing with him. I don't suppose he'll ever be caught," he added gloomily, "though I've an idea that if I'd only put on a . . ."

"Thank you," came the interruption from the depths of the armchair. "That's sufficient justification for pressing my point."

"What are you driving at?"

"I know that fish," replied the Senior Angler, "and I don't doubt you found it an infernally difficult cast. If it hadn't been, he'd never have survived to grow so big. Yet, when you failed to interest him, your only

remedy was a change of fly. Am I right ? "

" Well, what would you have done ? "

" Why didn't you spend an hour getting the measure of his lie," asked the elder man, " so that you could really show him your lure next time ? "

" What a waste of time ! " There was scorn in the other's voice. " I come here to fish ; I can practise at home if I want to."

" But do you ? " the Senior Angler persisted, shaking his head. " I think you accept an unnecessary limitation by missing the point. Of the countless factors—some unknown, many imponderable, and all contradictory—that govern this business of catching trout, one can directly influence only three. In common with most other anglers you depend too much on the lure and too little on its manner of presentation to the fish."

" Hmm," grumbled the young man. " You deny us our post-mortems so that you can have the pleasure of holding the whole inquest yourself."

" Enough from you," answered the critic, with mock severity. " You should remember that deceased has abandoned the right to speak and that his body attends the autopsy only in a passive rôle. As I was saying," he continued, " to experiment with different patterns of fly is easier, gives greater play to the imagination, and sometimes—to your worse confusion—pays a quicker dividend than the hard work required to improve your casting. You want results and grudge the fishing you would have to forgo and the fish you might catch in the time needed to polish your technique with rod and line. You try to attract the fish to the fly instead of making certain the fly goes to the fish."

The younger man opened his mouth to answer, but, to his obvious annoyance, was again interrupted ; this time by another of the trio, a small quiet fellow who had not yet spoken.

" I can't imagine you'll get to the end of your disquisition without some mention of that third factor you referred to," he said. " What is it ? "

" Ah ! The third and highest skill of all and the best reason for good rodwork," replied the Senior Angler, waving an expressive hand. " It's one of the imponderables in fishing, that calls for a study of water as well as the seasonal and daily variations in the habits of trout. It's a blend of imagination and experience that can, therefore, be cultivated and developed. Call it an eye for water or a nose for fish, as you will. I myself would define it as the ability to find a trout that has not shown itself. It is that sense that enables you to pick up good fish while the other fellow dredges the bottom with a leash of wet flies for tiddlers, on the excuse that they're not rising. But, of course, it's no

good finding your fish unless you can cover him. And that," he added, turning to the younger man, "is your trouble."

For a moment there was silence. The Senior Angler leant forward to lift his tankard from the floor near his feet; while the youngster, with a petulant look on his face, picked over the flies in his book and the quiet man scraped a dottle from his pipe. At last the third of the trio at the table spoke.

"Man," he said — and the north country was strong in his voice—"your theories are very interesting but they remain theories, all the same. I'm thinking they can have little practical application and I'll begin to believe them when you show us that big fish from under the weir; but not before."

"Perhaps I'll be able to take you up on that trout yet." The Senior Angler laughed. "But what would you say if I told you I knew a man who deliberately sacrificed not a week, or a month, but the best part of a season on three miles of his own trout stream just to put those very theories into practice?"

"I'd say the man was mad," replied the other, with conviction.

"That's what other people thought," the elder man continued. "But he persevered in spite of that, and, mad or not, changed himself from a fly-addict of the worst description, the experimenter-in-chief of the craft and a man impossible to live with, into a contented, unfrustrated, self-assured human being."

"Well! All I can say is that I'd like to have met your paragon," answered the north-country man.

"Maybe I'll take you along some day," continued the Senior Angler. "Admittedly the remedy was somewhat drastic, but his determination stands as a worthy example to lesser men, and, if only for that reason, you shall hear the story.

"If I named the man or the river you might identify him and the estate; and that would hardly be fair." The Senior Angler wormed himself still deeper into his chair as he continued. "So I'll just call him Roger and tell you that the river is one of those delightful and difficult streams where every bend discloses a fresh problem and where a lot of cover shelters good trout—you know, the sort of water that is paradise to the adept and can be plain hell for a duffer. And, to begin with, Roger was a duffer of the most ham-handed — until he took strong hold of himself. You see, he failed miserably in his attempts to catch fish, and the river got him down; to the point where his nerves became like a frayed cable and his wife began to think that only a separation could save her from his exasperations.

"It was not altogether Roger's fault that he was such a rabbit; he had no fatherly hand to guide him and I know, although he was keen enough, he was

given little chance to learn to fish. We were at school together, and, as he was an orphan, he spent some of the holidays at my home. His uncle, who then had the estate, was the boy's guardian, but he was a crusty old curmudgeon of a bachelor who wouldn't have brats disturbing his peace of mind or his precious trout. He neglected Roger shamefully; in fact, had it not been for Old Tige, it's very likely the lad would have grown up not even knowing what a trout rod looked like. But chances were few and far between; even Old Tige couldn't perform miracles and the lessons didn't get very far.

"Old Tige — goodness only knows why we called him that— was a real character and a wizard with his rod. He was as loyal as they're made and he was the only man the uncle would trust near the stream. For years he ran the house and the family—the old autocrat. He's retired now, but he still lives in a cottage on the estate and takes his brace of trout on occasion. The old fellow started as underkeeper and followed his master to the South African War, and when he returned he worked himself up till he finally became the family butler. His touch was every bit as delicate with a bottle as it was with his rod—it's funny how deft and handy these countrymen can be. Why, I remember the best batman I ever had was a raw poacher; I never ate better and my smalls have never been laundered like it before or since—but that's another story.

"It was at home that Roger met my cousin Mary, whom he was later to marry." The Senior Angler paused for a moment and applied himself to his tankard. "I didn't like him for it at the time," he sighed. "She was the apple of my eye, but, there it is, these things happen; women are unpredictable creatures. He had always been very intense, with a habit of treating everything with an unnecessary degree of seriousness, and that, I think, was what attracted her. But he's really the best of fellows and didn't deserve our opinion that the girl was wasted on him. They were very much in love, and still are, for that matter; and I must say she's stuck to him. His uncle, true to type, insisted that he should take up a job in colonial administration immediately after he had come down from his university, and she joined him in Africa.

"That, then, was the position when Roger came into the title and the estate. He had done well enough in Africa, it's true, but his heart was never really in the work, and, when his uncle died, he decided to retire at once and settle down to the business of country gentleman of leisure. But his fishing and hunting were not to come as easily as that; because, before he could send in his papers, war broke out and he realised he'd be tied to his job till it was over. So he sent his wife home

to look after affairs and set-to to make the best of prolonged exile.

"Now I told you Roger had always been an intense character burdened with a too-serious outlook on life in general. Under the circumstances it could hardly be a matter for wonder that he started to brood on the future. He must finally have come to the conclusion that his upbringing had not fitted him for the part of country squire and that the sooner he began to learn something about it the better. I was in Africa myself for most of the war and was able to keep in touch with him; so I can speak with some certainty about the method he used. He got his wife to send him an assortment of books on country subjects, including fishing, and set himself an intensive course of reading.

"Well, you know what these fishing-books are," the Senior Angler continued. "Once you start on them they can become a dangerous drug that demands continuance in ever-increasing doses. And that's what they did to Roger. They revived all the old keenness and kindled fresh ambitions, but the more he read the more he wanted to read. Of course, he had enough sense to appreciate that he ought to practise as well; so he ordered a rod, reel, and line to be sent out to him, and in due season the gear arrived. Then, one fine day, he put the tackle together and stepped out into the front garden to try out the theories he'd imbibed. But again fate and his own lack of true sense of proportion interfered with his plans, and his first attempt had unfortunate results.

"Roger was, at that time, stationed up-country among some of the less advanced tribes; and they can be funny cattle. They suffer from the most childish curiosity, and, like us, they sometimes pin an innocent faith to the most outrageous beliefs. Roger ought to have known all that when he started operations—bless him, he'd had enough experience. It was only to be expected that a crowd of wide-eyed kids would gather in awe at a safe and respectful distance while their elders—no doubt sharing with some of their more sophisticated white brothers the conviction that no sane man ever undertakes any work that does not bring him immediate and tangible reward—awaited developments in the background.

"Now you and I know how unnerving it is to be watched by critical eyes while we're casting. Roger was no exception to this rule, and as the audience grew larger and the babble of excited speculation grew louder, so his temper got shorter. At last he could bear it no longer and gave up in disgust. As he began to dismount his tackle the children became braver, until one little black urchin plucked up enough courage to ask what he'd been doing. 'I've been calling up

witches to make it rain,' he blurted out; and the kids scampered off with terrified shrieks to the shelter of their mothers' skirts or what-have-you.

"Of course, a moment's thought would have shown Roger the folly of such an answer to the child, but, as I say, the fellow was thoroughly exasperated. He should have remembered these people associate long rods and flexible lines with the white man's methods of communication that bring voices from afar into polished magic-boxes; and he should have been more careful than to tamper with their credulities. The obvious happened—it would. Can you doubt me when I tell you that some perverse meteorological phenomenon that same night produced enough rain to break a drought that had afflicted the district for too long.

"To say that Roger awoke next morning to find himself a popular man would understate the case — he was acclaimed mother and father of the people —but he didn't grasp the full measure of his fame until two days later when he returned to his bungalow in the evening to find deputations from three neighbouring districts camped on his verandah with pressing invitations to the Rainmaker-Magnificent to come with his dowsing-rod to water their parched lands. He never heard the last of it. Government got hold of the story and called for a full report, and, had there been no war in progress to occupy their minds, I don't doubt there would have been questions in the House. Anyhow, that was the end of his essay to master his rod in Africa and more's the pity; because, had he only persevered, he might have avoided his later disappointments. As it was, he hung up the rod and really got down to the books.

"Call me rebel, heretic, or just plain unbeliever," the Senior Angler went on, measuring the level of the ale in his tankard with an appraising eye. "I may be any of these, but I think all fishing-books are built to a common pattern. After making the usual conventional bow to minor matters such as rods and their use, their authors sigh with relief and apply themselves with relish to their entomology. You can take it from me they know human nature and how to play on its weaknesses. It takes a hardened cynic like myself to pick out the fact that most authors, having filled chapters with the most detailed descriptions of fly patterns for every conceivable occasion, always and quite ingenuously go on to hook every fish they describe on a well-tried old faithful—a blue dun or some patent hybrid strangely similar in its tying to a Greenwell."

The Senior Angler paused and looked at the other three men, one after another, as if inviting contradiction; but they remained silent, although the

thoughts of the youngest were written plainly on his face.

"Roger wasn't a heretic," he continued, "he was one of the believers. But even allowing for the cramping circumstances under which he had to live, the man overdid this fly business. As the months rolled by he collected more and more books, till in the end he possessed them all. Then, not content with his library, he fell to ordering large selections of flies from home, poring over them night after night with a magnifying-glass and filling whole notebooks with copious analyses of what he'd read. But why go on? Enough that when at long last he joined his wife in England and tried to catch trout in a difficult river, he found all his entomology useless and he failed miserably. And, what was worse, he knew no remedy but to go on filling himself up with the same medicine. Can you wonder his nerve went.

"You know, some people have all the luck and yet seem incapable of turning it to their advantage." The Senior Angler uncurled himself from his chair as he spoke and, rising, walked to the bar hatchway and knocked discreetly on the shelf with his empty tankard. "You and I have to make do with what we can manage to earn and we're not left much time for fishing; and that's why we should make the best of what we get. Yet there was this fellow Roger with money, an attractive wife, a country place, and a first-class trout stream; and even then he very nearly failed to make anything of his life. But that's the way it is; one can't have everything." He took the refilled tankard from the bar and returned to settle himself in the chair. "The fellow got back to England a year before I did," he went on, "and during that time I heard a lot of distressing rumours: he wasn't getting on with his wife; there was talk of a separation; his nerve was all to pieces; and so on. When I got home I was in two minds, therefore, whether to accept the long-standing invitation to go and fish his river. I had known them before they ever knew each other, and that meant both of them would probably try to enlist my sympathy and leave me nobody's friend. But after four years overseas, to fish any good water was worth listening to a dozen family rows, and in the end I sent him a telegram to say I would come down at once.

"I had a few last-minute qualms as I decanted myself and my gear on to the platform at Roger's home junction; but when Old Tige, who was there to meet me, welcomed me with the news that the river was in tip-top order, I began to feel glad I'd come. In fact, he put me in such good spirits with his stories of fish that by the time we had packed ourselves into the car I was congratulating myself that it was still early afternoon and that there would be time for a trout after tea.

Besides, I thought, it would postpone my hearing family details until I'd been fortified by a good dinner. But that was wishful thinking; because the skeleton was to walk out of its cupboard for my inspection before I could ever set eyes on the stream.

"Now when you approach Roger's place from the town, the main entrance is the first you come across. The house is half a mile from the gates and the drive is thickly bordered by all sorts of ornamental trees and shrubs. But instead of driving in, Old Tige stopped the car and pointed to a large notice directing traffic to the second entrance. I looked at the old man for an explanation and saw at once that he had something to tell me. 'Master Roger'—he always called him that—'is fishing.' 'Fishing?' I asked, wondering what he was driving at; because the river ran on the farther side of the house. 'Dash it all! He doesn't fish in the drive, does he?' I asked the question in all innocence and was therefore the more astounded at the reply. 'Yes,' answered Old Tige, looking at me in a very 'cagey' manner. 'But perhaps you'd like to walk down and meet him there while I take your things on to the house?' For a moment I thought my leg was being pulled—and the old man wasn't a bad hand at that when he put his mind to it—but there was a Chinese look on his face now that told me I'd get nothing more out of him; so I got out and he drove on.

"I entered the grounds through the side gate and set off down the drive. Old Tige's mysteriousness had put me on my guard and aroused my curiosity and I kept my eyes wide open. Well, I hadn't walked more than a couple of hundred yards when I came across something that made me stop. There, lying on the gravel and as near as dammit in the middle of the drive, was an ordinary sheep-hurdle, painted white. I examined it and was wondering who would waste paint on a thing like that when my eye lit on another oddity. On a level with the hurdle and right under the branches of a tree overhanging the drive, were a couple of pieces of two-by-four about a foot long. I picked one up and saw that two or three inches of the end of the wood were tightly wrapped with ordinary binder-twine. But I was still more puzzled when, round the next bend in the drive, I came across a repetition of the same thing: another hurdle and two more sticks bound with twine. This made it certain that they hadn't come there by accident, and I made a mental note to find out from Old Tige what they were there for, but, as it was, I got my answer almost at once.

"The drive to the house doesn't run straight. It wanders over the meadows just like a river, and, as I looked across one of the wide loops made by

the roadway, I saw Roger; and I must confess his occupation gave me a start. There he was, not so many yards away among the bushes bordering the drive, with a fishing-rod in his hands, and, what was more, the rod was bent and quivering; for all the world as if he were playing a fish. I watched him, fascinated. He went through all the motions. Finally he finished the business of bringing whatever he had at the end of his line to the bank by walking backward and dragging the thing ashore—I mean on to the grass by the drive. Only when he bent down and picked up his catch did I see what it was, and, as I don't doubt you've already guessed, it was one of those pieces of two-by-four with twine wrapped round the end.

"Well, there it was. I walked over and we shook hands, and when we had done with greetings I looked through the bushes and there, sure enough, was another hurdle and a piece of stick beyond it. Now that I saw what they were for, all my puzzlement disappeared and all the odd details fitted into place. The fellow had evolved a most realistic system of practice, and, even if over-elaborate, it was all very thorough and ingenious. And on his cast—oh, yes; he went to that length—he had a fly tied to a tiny treble so that he'd hook the binder-twine whichever way up it fell. The hurdle, of course, formed some sort of a hazard and was intended, I found out later, to represent the break of fast water.

"I made no remark about all this paraphernalia at the time. In fact, I got no chance to do so. 'Come on,' he said. 'Let's get along to the house and see Mary. She won't forgive me if I keep you out here yarning.' So off we went; but we had walked only a hundred yards when he suddenly stopped. 'Good heavens!' he exclaimed. 'I've forgotten the fish and I know they're wanted for dinner.' And with that he hurried back up the drive, to return in a few moments with his fishing-bag. When he opened it and showed me half a dozen good fish, all of a size, I took it for granted he'd been on the river before coming up to the drive to wait for me.

"Old Tige had arrived before us and warned Mary, and she met us on the lawns. But she did no more than greet me before she turned to her husband in a way that caught my attention at once. It was like a hen mothering the sole surviving chick of its brood. How had he got on, she asked; had he enjoyed his hour on the drive; was he overtired, and so on. Had she wanted to know whether he'd remembered to put on his under-pants and blow his nose I could not have felt more embarrassed for the fellow. He seemed not to mind, however; but when he started on her in the same vein I came to the conclusion that it was too much. Had she had a rest, he wanted to know; and had she been

lonely. I confess I became suspicious. One expects that sort of thing from a honeymoon couple, but when it takes place between people who've been married for six or seven years, there is every excuse for thinking their consciences are uneasy and that they're hiding something.

"Now I may be hypersensitive, but there seemed to be an atmosphere of strain and tension between them that made me wonder whether a good old family row wouldn't be better than all this exaggerated canoodling. But a moment later they let the cat out of the bag and I knew the worst." The Senior Angler paused to lift his tankard to his lips. "This is what happened," he went on. "Mary took the bag from her husband's shoulder and started to congratulate him on the fish. 'How lovely,' she crooned. 'How very clever of you. Tell me; where did you take them?' That was all right; there was nothing wrong in the question. But the fellow's answer flabbergasted me and I had the greatest difficulty in restraining myself from making a very rude remark. 'Oh, here and there,' he said. And then, without as much as the flicker of an eyelid, he added: 'The first two under the old oak and the others between there and the gates.' And when I tell you the old oak was the local name for an old tree-stump half-way up the drive, it'll help you to gauge the measure of my astonishment.

"I could hardly believe my ears. Either they were both stark staring mad or I was. Every little curious detail of the afternoon came back to my mind, from Tige's face at the gates to the way Roger ran back along the drive for his fish. But while I was wondering what to make of it all, there came one of those moments of silence that sometimes catch us unawares, and, in the awkward pause, some flash of inspiration showed me the intense solicitude of these two people for each other. In that instant I saw a man and a woman desperately in love and both desperately anxious — yes, almost frightened—about themselves. And neither wanted to show it. They were both biting back their feelings and trying to look as if catching live trout out of a gravel path was the most ordinary thing on earth. Fortunately Old Tige came out of the house a minute later to announce tea, and we all trooped into the hall.

"As luck would have it," went on the Senior Angler, "Roger had to attend some local meeting—political or parochial, I forget which—after tea, and that meant I couldn't go fishing. Not that I wanted to, by that time; besides, it gave me a chance of a private talk with Mary to find out what was behind this fantastic business. There was no need to mince matters. She and I had been brought up together, and although we hadn't seen each

other for years she was still the same old friend.

"'What's this game you're playing with Roger—catching trout in the drive?' I asked her. 'Are you both mad?' I remember she turned away and gazed out of the windows for a moment, and it struck me more forcibly than ever what a lucky man he was. 'No, only Roger,' she answered; and as she said it that anxious, mothering expression returned to her face. 'What d'you mean?' I demanded. 'Oh! You must have noticed it,' she replied. 'He's convinced he catches trout there and I feel I've just got to play up to it. It all started when he came home last year,' she went on. 'That horrible river did it. His nerves went to pieces because he could never hook a beastly trout and he worked himself up into the most dreadful tempers. It wore him out; he used to spend all day on the water and then stay up all night in the library with those books and flies of his. I suppose it was my fault,' she sighed. 'I only got angry with him instead of trying harder to draw him away from that wretched stream. But he was so desperately keen and had looked forward for years to his fishing.'

"She looked very near to tears," the Senior Angler went on. "But I had to get the whole story out of her, and after a bit of encouragement she told me some more. 'During the winter he got better,' she continued. 'He did manage to catch some pike down at the ponds, but I lived in dread of what would happen when March came. And, sure enough, when trout-fishing began again he became worse than ever. I used to think he was going quite mad and that I should have to go away and leave him. Then, quite suddenly, he started to fish on the drive instead. I don't know what made him do it, but from that moment he changed completely. He's quite normal now except for the trout. All his nerves and temper seem to have lost themselves in that one peculiarity and left the rest of him just as he used to be; although he's more quiet and reserved—as if there was something on his mind the whole time.'

"She looked out of the window again and I realised she was a very worried woman," the Senior Angler continued. "But I had to know even more if I was to help. 'Does anyone else know of this?' I asked her. Naturally, it would have done him no good to acquire a reputation locally for eccentricity. 'I don't think so,' she replied. 'I've managed to keep it to myself, but I'm afraid the neighbours will start to talk. You know what country people are. So far, they think it just a bit odd to practise so much. Oh! I forgot,' she added. 'Old Tige knows, of course; as a matter of fact, I didn't realise what was happening till he pointed it out to me. And next day he

slipped a couple of trout into Roger's bag when he wasn't looking; just to see if he was right. And he was. Now Tige has to go fishing every time Roger goes to the drive. It keeps the old man busy; but then, he likes catching trout. Oh, dear!' Her handkerchief went to her eyes as she spoke. 'He's terribly sweet to me, but sometimes I wonder if it wouldn't be better for him to go back to the river and his tempers instead of my having to encourage his delusion. I'm so worried and you've got to help me. I just don't know how to start to try to cure him, and I daren't go to anyone else for advice.'

"It stands to reason the girl's story perturbed me." The Senior Angler shook his head. "I'm no psychologist, but it has always seemed to me that once a man begins getting ideas of that sort you never know into what they'll develop. They want nipping in the bud. It struck me, however, that there was only one safe and certain way of starting a cure. His frustration had to be removed, and this could only be done by getting him back to the river to catch just one real trout. Mary wouldn't listen to my ideas at first, but she saw my point after some argument. In a case like that, to have a plan of any sort is a godsend, and in the end I managed to get her thoroughly interested and keen to help.

"She was a different woman after our talk, and I think Roger reacted to her brighter mood. I must say she was right when she told me he was considerate. He was in great form that night and showed how charming a host he could be. He and I had a long chat before we went to bed, and, although I had to go about it carefully, I was able to sound him about his fishing. It seemed Old Tige had persuaded him to forget all about flies for a spell and get down to some solid rodwork; and it was the old man who had rigged up all those aids on the drive. But when I made a guarded suggestion that we should fish the river together on the morrow he refused point-blank; moreover, he started to argue when I tried to press the point. 'My trout in the drive don't mind what fly I use,' he said. 'I'm happier that way and you must admit I'm getting results.' That shook me, I can tell you, and seemed to remove any doubt I might have had about his obsession. So I let the matter drop to await a more favourable opportunity; and it's as well I did, because my chance came next day.

"Perhaps one gets callous as one grows older," the Senior Angler continued. "Or it may be that war taught one to build up a wall of defence behind which one could hide within one's own personality, shut off from all outside influence. At any rate, in spite of the surprises of the day and my preoccupation for poor old Roger, I slept well and woke next morning to a perfect late-season fishing day

with a soft south wind and a sky half-covered by high cloud. It was taken for granted that I was going fishing, and, although I made no suggestion, Roger promised to walk down to the river later to see how I was getting on.

"When I got to the water the fish were not yet rising, but I managed to interest several of them by trying every likely place. 'Here and there a lusty trout'—now who on earth wrote that?" The Senior Angler paused and scratched his head in doubt. "Never mind," he went on. "As the day grew warmer, however, the fish moved more energetically and by mid-morning I had four or five sizable trout in the bag. That was doing well enough; so I pulled out my pipe and sat down to watch a pool that had always been a favourite. It was the devil of a place to fish; the hither side too deep to wade comfortably and the main stream running fast about two-thirds of the way across. Beyond that again there was quiet water that had always been the haunt of big trout; but even Old Tige himself had never had much change out of them. Well, as luck would have it, I hadn't been there many minutes when my eye caught just the suspicion of a little dimple on the surface over towards the other side of the river. It was one of those quiet rises that generally mean big fish. My fingers itched and I put out the pipe and crept a bit closer to the bank, taking cover behind a bush. It presented an absorbing problem, and while I was working out how to get a fly to him, he rose again. As the little suck appeared on the surface, I was startled out of my wits by a hoarse gasp in my right ear.

"Yes." The Senior Angler took a pull at his tankard and cocked his eye at the case holding a stuffed trout that hung from the wall above his chair. "Yes; it was Roger," he went on, putting the pot down again. "He told me afterwards he had spotted me watching the pool and had also seen the rise. He'd crept along after me with no idea I hadn't noticed him. But at the moment I don't know if I was more astonished at his sudden arrival or at the look on his face as he stared across the pool at the place where the fish had risen. Talk about the excitement of the chase! There was that fixed glassy look in his eye that you probably last saw when your wife reached the bargain basement. If ever I'd seen determination written in a man's expression it was then and there. Of course, my reactions aren't altogether slow and I realised at once that fate had presented me with the one great opportunity of getting the fellow back to normality; the one psychological moment in which to lure him back to wet water.

"My rod was lying on the grass behind me. I reached back and drew it gently towards me over the grass. As my hand

closed on the butt I had to fight off the temptation to have at the fish myself; but my better nature asserted itself and I passed the rod to him. He took it from me without a word of acknowledgment; in fact, it's pretty certain he didn't know where it came from. Not a muscle quivered and his hand was as firm as a rock; he had forgotten me and the rest of the world and his whole mind was on that trout. Without taking his eye off the water for a moment, he got up on to one knee and made a few false casts to get the feel of the rod and let out line. Then, keeping a coil of loose line in his hand, he let drive.

"You know, I'd had quite a few shocks in the past twenty-four hours," the Senior Angler went on, "but I think the greatest of them all was that cast of Roger's. The weeks and months of practice on the drive, even if they had made him mad, had transformed him into an expert. Dash it all! I couldn't have done better myself. The fellow whom I'd always regarded as ham-handed produced a masterpiece. As the line straightened on its journey, he let go the coil in his hand, and when half of the slack had shot through the rings of the rod he checked it ever so slightly; but not enough to stop it altogether, because the rest of the coil went out also. The result was beautiful. The fly alighted like a feather a foot or so above the spot where the fish had risen and a yard of slack cast fell on the water well above it. Had it been done any other way, the current would have dragged the fly at once; but, as it was, it floated along serenely for a few inches, just far enough to deceive the trout.

"The fly disappeared in another of those quiet dimples," the Senior Angler went on. "You know, the sort that look as if the trout was only gently kissing the underside of the water's surface and yet make you imagine you hear a loud sup as he sucks it down. Roger never blinked; his nerve was under iron control. He gave the fish plenty of time to turn down and then he tightened on him—yes, tightened, I said." The Senior Angler turned in his chair to glower at the small group round the table with accusation in his eye. "This was none of your harpoon work; driving the iron home or whatever your whaling expression is. And no snatch either—however simian your propensities it's a waste of time to climb trees to recover a cast. No," he continued, settling back in his chair, apparently mollified that there had been no protest, "Roger just tightened; a turn of the wrist, no more, and he was into that trout good and solid.

"I shall not describe the proceedings. Enough that Roger had the upper hand from the start. His touch was superb. All that dragging of little sticks across the drive must have

instilled into him an exact appreciation of what a gut-cast would stand, and he made use of every ounce of pressure that the gear could afford. I sat up to watch, but made no attempt to help. The battle was his alone. But for me it was more than the mere tiring and landing of a big trout; I was witnessing a human transformation. I saw in the fight a determined man struggling for everything that goes to make life worth living; for his own and his wife's happiness; yes, for his very reason. And he won in no uncertain manner. The end came at last, but by the time the trout showed its belly Roger was waist-deep in the stream. I passed him my landing-net, and as he lifted the fish out of water I breathed silent thanks. The frustration had been removed, and though this would not altogether cure him, nature would do the rest. As long as he was not reminded of his delusion he would never want to go to the drive again for his fish.

"With the trout once safely on the bank came the expected reaction. The fellow sank to the ground beside me, speechless, and he was so unsteady that I had to light his cigarette for him. While he smoked it I killed the fish and removed the fly—what was it? You would ask that, wouldn't you? Well, I'm happy to say it mattered so little that I've forgotten. Even Roger has never wanted to know what it was, but that only goes to prove my point. However, as I was saying, he was drenched to the waist; so I gave him time only to finish his smoke before we set off homeward.

"We were two very happy men as we walked to the house, and I was all impatience to see Mary's face when she heard the glad tidings. But if I thought ours was to be a triumphal entry, a sad disappointment awaited me; because that crazy household still had its biggest shocks of all in reserve. She met us in the hall, and I shall not forget the look on Roger's face: affection, pride, and confidence radiated from it as he offered her the trout on a letter-tray he'd picked up off a table. I was pretty cock-a-hoop, you may be sure, and certain the girl would feel the same. But not a bit of it.

"As Mary looked at her husband, that dreadful shadow of anxiety crept back into her eyes. 'How very, very clever of you, my dear,' she began bravely; but as she spoke her lips trembled. 'Where did you . . . ?' And there she stopped short, aghast, as she suddenly caught sight of the pool of water that had dripped from his sodden pants on to the polished floor. Next moment she put her hands over her face and burst into a flood of tears.

"Poor Roger's face fell a mile and he looked down foolishly at the wretched fish he was nursing. Then the tray clattered to the floor and he

sprang forward to take her into his arms. But she pushed him away roughly as she choked back her sobs. 'No, no!' she cried. 'It can't go on any longer. I've tried so hard to bear it. I didn't mind you being a little mad, but . . . but . . .' She seized the handkerchief I held out and wiped her nose as she collapsed into a chair. 'But what?' asked poor Roger, completely flummoxed. 'I didn't mind you thinking you caught fish in the drive,' she wailed, her voice rising in a crescendo that could only end in hysterics, 'but if you expect me to believe you've been swimming in it as well, I'm going to run away.'

"Well, she'd done it now," the Senior Angler went on. "My heart fell to my boots; for I was certain that the girl's unfortunate outburst could only have the effect of fixing, firmly and irrevocably, his delusion upon him. But I couldn't blame her. It was my own fault for not having been more explicit the evening before. For months she'd kept up the brave show, but it seemed pitiful she'd been unable to carry it off for just another minute or two till he'd told her where he'd caught the trout. All she need have done was to tell him how clever she thought him and leave the rest to the fisherman's natural instinct; even a madman doesn't want to catch trout in a drive when he can take them from a river.

"I looked at Roger to see what he'd do. There he stood, his jaw dropped and his eyes goggling, rubbing his forehead with the back of his hand like a man waking from a nightmare. His reactions were alarming; but next moment came the greatest surprise of all, and if the effect of Mary's words on him had been startling, it was as nothing compared with the jolt he gave me when he spoke. 'Then you're not mad!' he ejaculated. 'And here I've been worrying my head off for months and pretending to catch fish for you out of a gravel path; just because I thought you'd gone dotty and wanted to keep you happy.'

"So he wasn't mad after all." The Senior Angler sighed and emptied his tankard. "What could one do or say? There are occasions when one feels such an ass that silence is the only dignified course. I picked the trout off the floor and put it on its tray again, and then I realised it was about time to leave these love-birds and go back to the river to cool off. But as I left the hall I couldn't resist one last backward glance. Roger was on his knees beside her and they were regarding each other as if they'd just been reunited after years of separation. Mary was talking to him like a shy schoolgirl. 'What made you think I was mad?' she asked her husband, smiling through the tears. 'It was Old Tige who told me, darling,' he answered. 'At first I wouldn't believe him; so he slipped two

trout into my bag for me to bring home to you, and the way you behaved about them made me think he was right. After that, I made him go fishing every time I went to the drive; but he didn't seem to mind.'

"Then, as I watched them, a look of alarm appeared suddenly on their faces. The same thought had entered both heads at once, but it was Roger who put it into words. 'Then it must be Old Tige who's as mad as a hatter,' he whispered. At that I tiptoed quietly from the room."

The Senior Angler rose lazily to his feet and stretched himself. "Just time for another beer," he said, glancing at his wrist-watch.

"But was he?" asked the youngest member. "I mean, was Old Tige really mad?"

"Of course not." The Senior Angler laughed. "He was the sanest of us all. He'd been quick enough to see that family trouble was brewing and took very effective action to give them both something to worry about. Besides, he liked fishing."

There was a moment's silence in the parlour, broken at last by the north-country voice. "Hmm," it rumbled. "Very ingenious and very interesting. But I still won't believe you until you've caught that trout from under the weir."

"But you'll believe when you see him?" came the guileless query.

"Yes."

"Good," answered the Senior Angler, walking to the bar hatchway and knocking gently on the shelf with his empty tankard. "He's in the larder. Have a look at him as you go in to supper. But don't ask me what fly I took him on," he added, "because it doesn't matter."

COMMENT.

THE death of the King imposed a truce upon the political Parties. It suspended, in mid-air as it were, a debate on foreign affairs in which the Opposition had, or thought it had, a point against the Prime Minister in the matter of his speech to the Congress of the United States. The point concerned Korea and the respective possibilities that a truce might not be arranged, or that if arranged it might be broken, or that even if kept it might not be followed by a proper settlement. A strong and growing body of opinion across the Atlantic holds that in any of these eventualities an all-out war against China would be the only effective answer. Mr Churchill's statement to Congress that if a truce were broken, the British response would be "prompt, resolute, and effective" has been stretched by his critics into a promise of support for such a policy. Of course it was nothing of the kind, neither our Foreign Office nor the State Department having committed itself to any definite line of action that should follow a breach of a truce. Nor, if Mr Churchill's words are closely studied, will they be found to carry the interpretation his critics here have tried to fasten on them. In fact, at first it was not quite certain if the Opposition charge against Mr Churchill was that he had misled Congress about opinion in this country, or that he had misled the House of Commons about opinion in the United States. Neither charge was easy to sustain, and the Opposition, returning *à ses moutons*—although after three weeks the mutton was a little cold—substituted a general indictment of Mr Churchill for having committed the country without authority to a possible extension into China of the war in Korea. This Mr Morrison attempted to prove in a speech consisting largely of quotations from American newspapers and establishing nothing except perhaps the speaker's own ineptitude in foreign affairs; whereupon Mr Churchill dynamited his critics by disclosing that many months before the Conservatives took office, the Socialist Government had given a pledge of the very sort he was now accused of offering and that in his visit to the United States he had added nothing to this. After an exhibition of abuse from Mr Bevan and some attempts to cover the discomfiture of Mr Attlee and Mr Morrison by questioning the propriety of Mr Churchill's inconvenient disclosure, the Opposition collapsed, the Government winning the division by a substantial majority.

As luckless was the Socialist attempt to make a martyr of Mr Hardie, the resigning Chairman of the Iron and Steel Corporation. It presently transpired that Mr Hardie had resigned, not because of any differences with the Minister, but because he found himself in deep dis-

agreement with his own colleagues, who, incidentally, were all appointed by the Socialist Government. (Mr Hardie has since protested, not very effectively, against this conclusion.) The attempt to exploit the resignation and to make a Party issue of it was about as foolish and factious a performance as any that an Opposition could put on; and the Socialists got another well-deserved drubbing in the lobbies.

Both these episodes are incomprehensible unless account is taken of the struggle for leadership within the Socialist Party. Mr Attlee and Mr Morrison are compelled to offer battle on unfavourable ground because they know that if they do not, Mr Bevan will; that the backbenchers will follow him; and that the effective leadership will pass into his hands. However, these sham fights, which brought little credit to the Government's opponents, were soon merged in the major battle of the Budget.

This is likely to be the testing-time of Mr R. A. Butler, who has not, until now, been a very familiar figure to the electorate. He belongs to what is sometimes called — with an undertone of scorn — the Tory intelligentsia, the implication being that not many Tories are intelligent, and the truth being that Mr Butler is the kind of Tory who can meet the Socialist intelligentsia on their own ground and give as good as he gets. As Minister of Education he brought in what was generally allowed to be a very successful Bill on a territory which has often proved the undoing of a legislator. In Opposition from 1945 to 1951 he was more conspicuous in the councils of the Party than in the House, where he was lucid rather than forceful, a master of reason and not of invective. But outside the House he was the maker of policy, the centre of the young men who wanted a constructive answer to the Socialists. Mr Churchill, who has always preferred to let policy wait upon power, in other words, to postpone declarations about what he was going to do until he was in a position to do it, did not always take his ingenious lieutenant very seriously. Mr Churchill would rather have concentrated on the misdeeds of the Socialists than have given them an opportunity of changing the subject. However, he recognised that something was necessary, if only to satisfy the demands of the Party at its annual gatherings; and no doubt he supposed that Mr Butler would provide what was needed without unduly committing the Party in the future.

His accession to what is virtually the third place in the Government was, at first sight, a little surprising; though on fuller consideration the appointment seems almost inevitable, since any alternative choice for the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer was open to serious objections. But it places Mr Butler very high in the hierarchy of the Party. A man who has been Chancellor of the Exchequer does not necessarily become the Leader later on; but

the Leader is usually a man who has been Chancellor of the Exchequer. Asquith, Bonar Law, Baldwin, Neville Chamberlain, each in turn was Chancellor, and each was to be Prime Minister. Even Mr Churchill served his time at the Treasury, although that was hardly his most successful office or gave him his happiest memories.

What the House—and particularly the Opposition — is now waiting to discover is whether Mr Butler, whose intellectual competence is not in doubt, has the toughness and combativeness to fight a controversial Budget through all its stages with the support of only a slender majority. The wicket will be sticky and the bowling is likely to be formidable, with Mr Gaitskell and Mr Douglas Jay opening and Mr Bevan standing by as the first change. But Mr Butler may yet surprise the House and those outside who do not know him by the skill and tenacity of his defence. He will, indeed, need all of both that he can muster.

While Mr Butler will bear the burden and heat of the day, and finance will be the Hougomont of the Parliamentary battle, Mr Oliver Lyttelton will be in charge of another important sector of the front, which is likely to see some hard fighting. In two different quarters of the Colonial Empire trouble has for long been fomenting. Malaya is an obvious danger spot. The "emergency" continues to drag on. The "bandits" are still unrepressed. The murders of soldiers, policemen, and planters still continue. And no one really knows the answer. From time to time some new personality is produced and everyone is full of hope. First it was Sir Harold Briggs, then it was Sir Rob Lockhart, now it is General Sir Gerald Templer. New plans, new personalities, new policies — and still the depressing struggle takes its toll of human life, and the production of rubber and tin, so vital a factor to the finances of the sterling area, inevitably dwindles. The new Secretary of State lost no time in visiting the scene, but no one feels very confident that Mr Lyttelton will succeed where Mr Creech Jones and Mr Griffiths failed.

One trouble is the extraordinarily complex character of the political pattern. There is Singapore with one Government; there is Kuala Lumpur with another; and within the Federation of Malaya are some nine subsidiary administrations, mostly under rajahs. This multiplicity might conceivably work in peaceful times, but is quite unsuited to present circumstances, which demand one strong central authority to give the orders and to see that they are carried out. The appointment of General Templer with his wider powers may mend matters, but something even more drastic may be found essential. Is it necessary again to emphasise that the enemy are not "bandits," but an organised guerrilla army, that the operations are not just a business for the police, but have all the

character of a war, and that the nature of the country and of its population is heavily in favour of the rebels?

The other danger spot for the Government is Central Africa, where the plans for a new Dominion are making little progress. Here Mr Lyttelton has inherited a prejudiced situation. When Mr Griffiths and Mr Gordon Walker visited Central Africa in the late summer they had an opportunity which they failed to take. They might have given a clear, resolute lead for federation. Instead, they sat uncomfortably on the fence, asking everybody for suggestions and disclaiming any idea of dictating a policy to anyone. Naturally they got plenty of suggestions, and most of these crystallised into opposition to the scheme, which did not go far enough to suit the white settlers of Southern Rhodesia, and went a good deal too far to suit the Africans in the three territories concerned.

The supporters of federation will have a second—and possibly a last—chance at the end of April when the Conference which met at the Victoria Falls last summer will resume its deliberations. Some developments are fairly certain. One is that this Government will not repeat the error of its predecessor, but will climb down from the fence and give the lead that was required from the start. Another is that the feature in the scheme which gave the most serious offence to Sir Godfrey Huggins and his Government, namely, the appointment of a Minister of Native Affairs, who would be responsible to Whitehall, will be jettisoned. This was a precaution which no Government so nearly approaching Dominion status as that of Southern Rhodesia would accept for a moment. The third and most important development — and the one which will certainly arouse the hottest controversy in the House of Commons—is likely to be a recognition of the fact that in the last resort, and failing general agreement, a settlement will have to be imposed by Her Majesty's Government. Such a suggestion will be met with uproar in Westminster and in Africa, but is really unavoidable unless there is to be a complete abdication of leadership. If, from the beginning, it had been made clear to everybody concerned that the last word would be with the Government of the United Kingdom, probably the reaction would not have been so serious. But no such announcement was made; in fact, so far as anything was said it was in the sense that unless all the parties were broadly agreed on federation, nothing would be done. This expectation having been encouraged, the reaction to the other policy will be all the stronger and may even be violent. In this, as in some other matters, the present Government are the victims of the shortcomings of their predecessors.

Such was the public preoccupation with the Royal Funeral that the discussions about German

rearmament, which followed, had scant attention. Yet here is one of those awkward questions which can be argued hotly from either angle. The Wehrmacht is a horrid spectre which took the Western World six years to lay at fearful cost in life and suffering. The idea that now, seven years afterwards, the spectre should again be raised is more than many people, particularly in France, can stomach. They point out that ever since the war ended we have been trying to indoctrinate the German people with peaceful ideas; and that now we are seriously proposing to give them back those dangerous toys we had such trouble in taking away from them. As for the suggested precautions, there were precautions after Versailles; and what did these avail? To rearm Germany, they insist, is to sow the dragon's teeth and to grow a crop that may well destroy the next generation of young Europeans.

But then there is the other argument. Russia has thirty-six divisions in Europe and her satellites have sixty more, with vast reserves in the East. To hold and defeat a Russian attack the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has estimated that it requires fifty divisions, but so far General Eisenhower has scraped together no more than twenty, the chief defaulter being France, which has contributed only five instead of the ten she promised. In these circumstances, the importance of twelve divisions from Western Germany is beyond question. Unfortunately, Dr Adenauer and his Government are as well aware of this as we are. At last they have a strong bargaining point, and accordingly they are asking for admission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, for the restoration of German political freedom in the Saar, and for the end of the Allied occupation of Germany. These are major concessions which have certainly not allayed the qualms of the French—or of a good many British. Yet the uncomfortable fact remains that if Western Europe is not prepared to find the men for its own defence, it may have to give Dr Adenauer what he wants—or face the threats of Russia with an entirely inadequate force.

In February Asia provided a striking contrast in Elections. The Election in India was a truly remarkable achievement. Although the electorate is the largest in the world, and three-quarters of it is illiterate, the voting passed off without disorder or serious set-back. No less than 170 million men and women went to the polls, and there was a surprising absence of communal feeling. In Ambala, for example, a city of sacred associations for the Sikhs, a Moslem was actually returned and no heads were broken.

On the whole the Congress Party can congratulate itself on the result. It has won a substantial majority in the central Government, although in some of the States it has suffered rebuffs. By contrast with the well-drilled and long established

ranks of Congress, the Opposition presents a fragmentary appearance, the return of many Independents being a sure sign of unorganised activity. The Communists have met with less support than was expected, but have scored considerable successes in Madras, Hyderabad, and Travancore Cochin. On the other hand, in Rajasthan (better known under its old name of Rajputana) and in Orissa the princes and landlords of the Right have polled strongly.

The other Election was in Persia. Here, too, the Government has triumphed, but not without disorder and something more than a hint of malpractices. In one province the Governor and three persons supervising the Election were killed, further disturbances followed, and martial law was proclaimed. In another province the first count was found to favour the Opposition, whereupon the voting was suspended and a fresh count gave a result more satisfactory to the Government. Finally in Teheran, where there are about 100,000 qualified voters, 144,000 votes were cast. This suggests a mobilisation of the dead, or a duplication of the living, on a scale unequalled even in an old-time Irish election. However, Dr Moussadek has got his majority for what it is worth, and an endorsement of his oil policy, for what good that may do him.

The perfection of the pageantry with which the funeral of King George was carried out was the admiration of the representatives of foreign countries who were present. The foreigner can envy, but can seldom imitate, a technique which some of the older monarchies, now vanished, were once able to practise, though none so flawlessly as the Royal House of this country. Tradition has a lot to do with it; and a Republic lacks this particular tradition and the equipment that accompanies it. Such an occasion, for example, as the funeral of President Roosevelt in 1945 was, by comparison with the Royal funeral, a drab and rather loosely organised business, sombre without solemnity, formidable in scale, but uninspiring in effect. Yet something more is necessary than tradition, or brilliant uniforms, or heralds, or the music of many bands, or the marching of well-drilled men. The arrangements for the funeral of King George were carried out with a precision so apparently effortless as to conceal the meticulous preparations that must have preceded it. There was no hitch, or if there were hitches they were not noticeable; but the absence of mischance meant that every smallest detail had been covered. It was not always so. When Queen Victoria died, no one in Court circles had any experience of a Royal funeral or had even seen one except, perhaps, as a child. Much, accordingly, went amiss; and when it is remembered how short was the time of preparation allowed, that the ceremony went as well as it did was more surprising than anything that went wrong.

One notorious hitch had con-

sequences which remain to this day and are still a cause of heartburning. On arrival at Windsor the coffin containing the body of the old Queen was placed on a gun-carriage, which was to be drawn to St George's Chapel by horses of the Royal Artillery. But the horses had been standing in the cold for some time, the lieutenant in charge seems to have forgotten or delayed giving the order to "Walk march," and the two wheelers started off by themselves before the leaders were ready to take the strain. Finding an unexpectedly heavy load, the wheelers began to kick and plunge, and when they were got clear of the gun-carriage it was found that they had broken their traces. Various makeshifts were being considered when Prince Louis of Battenberg suggested that the naval guard of honour should be harnessed to the gun-carriage and draw it to St George's Chapel. The Artillery officers present were furious, regarding the whole incident and the proposed solution as a slight on their corps; but King Edward intervened, the ratings were set to work, and without further difficulty the gun-carriage was man-handled to the Chapel. Other versions of this affair have lately appeared, but this is the story of a competent eye-witness who had a good deal to do with the accident and its sequel. What is not always remembered is that the Queen's coffin had a second journey to make—from St George's Chapel to the Mausoleum where the actual burial took place, and for that the Artillery horses were again brought into service, this time fortunately without mishap. Since then, although the Gunners are given their turn at some stage in the proceedings, the use of sailors to draw the gun-carriage with the Royal coffin from Westminster Hall to Paddington and from Windsor Station to St George's Chapel has become the established custom. Every time this happens the old story is remembered; and every time the feelings of the Royal Artillery are ruffled afresh.

Amid all the solemnity of the Lying-in-State of King George in Westminster Hall the impressive figures of the Gentlemen-at-Arms attracted considerable attention. A lot of people were uncertain who those elderly and splendidly attired officers were and what their function was. Normally they are not much in evidence, but at the Lying-in-State of the King they have an especial privilege to claim and duty to perform. They are in fact the King's Personal Bodyguard, with a history taking them back to King Henry VIII. and the early years of the sixteenth century, when there was as yet no other force charged especially with the protection of the King's person. Their chief service was to accompany him in battle, and on two occasions—at Guinegatte in 1513 and at the siege of Boulogne in 1544—they are known to have discharged this duty. The part they played in the Civil War

more than a century later is uncertain, but with the King constantly in action it is unlikely that his personal bodyguard was absent. They must certainly have been at Naseby, and no doubt were among those who kept King Charles from that final charge and hurried him off the stricken field.

In more modern times their service has been infrequent and limited, as a rule, to State occasions. The last time they were paraded for actual duty was in 1848, the Year of Revolution. A crowd was reported to be marching on Westminster, and the young Queen asked that her Honourable Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms should be summoned for the defence of St James's Palace. The mob never materialised and the bodyguard, armed by tradition with battle-axes, was fortunately not required to prove its prowess. Nowadays, as visitors to the Lying-in-State no doubt observed, the Corps is recruited from distinguished and elderly officers of the Army and Royal Marines.

By one of the chances of history, to so many of our Queens the news of accession came in strange or dramatic fashion. To Mary Tudor it was a message to mount and ride swiftly to the friends who were gathering to assert her right against Northumberland and his supporters. Elizabeth I., on a razor-edge of danger, was sitting under an oak at Hatfield, when she heard that her sister had died. At five o'clock on a June morning in 1837 an Archbishop of Canterbury and a Lord Chamberlain—unlikely visitors at such an hour—were pulling at the bell and hammering on the door of Kensington Palace, till at last they roused a sleepy porter; and presently a girl, fresh from sleep, with a wrap thrown hurriedly over her nightdress, came down to receive their homage. And on 6th February, Queen Elizabeth II. was in a little house in the highlands of Kenya when word was brought to her of her father's death.

By something more, surely, than chance, the reigns of the Queens have been memorable in our history. The rule of Mary Tudor, it is true, ended with gloom and the fall of Calais. But in the first Elizabethan age, Englishmen entered on their heritage of the sea and discovered the wonders of their own language. The reign of Anne was illustrious for the victories of an elder Churchill, and that of Victoria, fifty years ago in time but ages off by feeling, was the high noon of Imperial achievement. If there is anything in auspices, the promise is good for the new age of Elizabeth. At least the throne has never had a more secure place in the affections of the people. It has withstood the explosions of two wars and the cold blasts of half a century of unkindness to kings. At the death of Queen Victoria there were eighteen monarchies in Europe; today there are eight; and while none can tell what the morrow will bring, a British

Republic, which in 1870 seemed something more than a bare possibility, is today an eventuality as unlikely as it would be unwelcome.

To call a man a courtier is not, as a rule, to pay him a compliment. The term brings to mind the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and suggests a man idle and probably raffish in his life, greedy for any crumbs that may fall from the monarch's table, and, above all, careful to say in all circumstances not what he knows to be true, but what he judges to be agreeable. By the common opinion of bygone days a country's blessings flowed from the monarch and its evils from his courtiers.

Yet during the last 150 years the significance of the term has greatly changed. The old courtier has disappeared, but in his place are many men who enter the King's service in one capacity or another and serve, as the old courtiers served, but in a very different spirit, for a kind of screen between the monarchy and the world outside. Their fathers may have been in the Royal Household before them, or they may have some other connection with the Court. However this may be, they are heirs to a tradition of loyalty, integrity, and self-abnegation. Their lives are very laborious. Their time does not belong to them or to their families. Their devotion to Throne and Person must be unlimited. Their reward, in a pecuniary sense, is unimpressive, and they die unenriched.

The Royal House in this country has been fortunate in those it has been able to claim for its service; and among them Lord Sysonby, better remembered as Sir Frederick Ponsonby, must take a high place.[1] His respect for the Throne was profound. He venerated monarchy as an institution and had a warm personal affection for many members of the Royal Family. Unlike the courtier of old, he never hesitated to tell unwelcome truths, when he judged the telling of them to be his duty. Sometimes, as he relates in his book of memories, he drew on his head resounding snubs, as when Queen Victoria told him he must learn not to express views which no one wished to hear. His knowledge of ceremonial and of what may be called the social discipline of Courts was probably unmatched. He knew the answer to every question of etiquette that might be asked, but he never allowed protocol to encroach too far or to frustrate some desirable event.

As successively Equerry, Assistant Private Secretary, Treasurer and Keeper of the Privy Purse, he served through three reigns. Queen Victoria was an uncomfortable employer. She took umbrage very easily and would show her displeasure by virtually sending the offender

[1] 'Recollections of Three Reigns.' By Sir Frederick Ponsonby, 1st Lord Sysonby. (Eyre & Spottiswoode.)

to Coventry; and there he might stay, as Ponsonby once stayed, not for days, but for months. Later on, when he wanted to marry, she disapproved, on the grounds that as a good husband told his wife everything, the future Mrs Ponsonby would soon be possessed of all the most intimate secrets of the monarch. Eventually and reluctantly she relented and the marriage took place; but the incident reveals the penalties of a place in the Royal Household in those days and the character of the service expected of those who filled it.

The passing of the old Queen must have eased the position of the members of her Household, or at least of the younger members. Of the three monarchs Ponsonby served, King Edward VII., it would seem, was his favourite. The King could be as difficult as his mother, but the storms, though violent, were short. He was sometimes extremely exacting, but was also considerate, kind, and generous. Above all, he was remarkably knowledgeable on matters of etiquette and protocol and taught his staff at least as much as they could teach him.

Ponsonby has less to say about the reign of King George V., perhaps because it was more recent and discretion dragged at his pen. The new King hated insincerity, but was also inclined to be intolerant of disagreement. At one time, Ponsonby reflects, he was under the Royal displeasure for his constant criticisms. Later he was accepted as a sort of *advocatus diaboli*, whose opposition to some new idea or plan favoured by Royalty could be counted upon as a matter of course.

Some may feel that any book of this kind is almost a betrayal of confidence and that the Royal Family should be protected, at any rate for a long term of years, against the published recollections of a member of the Household. The point is arguable. What must be conceded is that if such a book is permissible at all, no one could better the taste Lord Sysonby shows on every page. Equally beyond argument is the interest of a picture of monarchy as it used to be, of State visits to continental potentates, described with liveliness and humour, and of the developing conception of the Royal institution in Britain, through three successive reigns and against a background of vanishing Royal houses throughout Europe. The monarchy, in the last years of Queen Victoria, was something very different from the same monarchy in the last years of King George V. What especially was changed, but only in the sense that it was strengthened, was its place in the affections of the people.

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